University of Alberta

Locked in His Castle:
Female Gothic as Representation of the Carceral Nature of Domesticity

by

Laura Anne Neilson Bonikowsky ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the important people in my life
who encouraged and supported me:

my mother Anne Neilson
my children Andrew and Amanda Joy
my brother Doug Neilson
my best friend Cheryl Nichols
and especially my husband Norm Bonikowsky

Abstract

Ann Radcliffe, Sophia Lee, Eliza Fenwick and many other women writers of Gothic fiction appropriated the genre that began with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and gave it a uniquely female perspective. The Gothic genre in the hands of women writers becomes a coded feminist discourse that affords a means of female-centred social and political commentary. By examining the female Gothic novel against its social context, we can achieve a greater understanding of the socio-political structures of home, marriage and maternity. It is paradoxical that the very conventions that oppressed women are used to such great effect by women writers who employ a covert subtext to criticize the patriarchal order that restricts women to a socially-constructed, appropriately "feminine" space—the domestic sphere. The surface tale of the Gothic novel is undercut by the subtext, creating a palimpsestic text with which contemporary readers could identify and that affords the modern reader a view of the carceral nature of late eighteenth-century domesticity.

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Introduction

The heroine waits breathlessly in her chamber. Menacing shadows, cast by the flickering light of a solitary candle, dance on the walls. She looks out her window at the sublime scenery, barely visible by the glow of the moon, and sees on the ramparts below a ghostly apparition. Footsteps echo in the corridor. They pause at her door — an unseen hand rattles the knob. A gust of wind extinguishes the flame. The door creaks. The heroine is in danger, but from whom, or from what, is not clear.

This scenario quickly became a stereotype of the genre that began with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. Unlike Walpole's text, which relies on mysterious events and supernatural apparitions to teach a moral lesson, Gothic novels by women[1] typically, as Diane Hoeveler states, "presents a blameless heroine triumphing through a variety of passive-aggressive strategies over a male-created system of oppression and corruption, the 'patriarchy'" (9). As Hoeveler also suggests, the melodrama extant in Gothic texts is informed by the "generally hyperbolic sentimentalism" that saturated British literature of the time (9). Gothic novels are characterized by symbolic dramatizations that rely on hyperbole, grandiose events, secrets, disguises, abductions and mysterious parentage and are therefore amenable to caricature. Charles Maturin made a similar observation in his description of the typical Gothic heroine in the *London Critical Journal* in February 1818:

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[1] I will use the term "female Gothic" in a literal and limited sense to describe Gothic novels by women writers. I acknowledge the arguments for female Gothic as the separate and distinctive genre Anne Williams describes in *Art of Darkness*. In my discussion, however, I wish to maintain a female-centred argument, to discuss books by women which emanate from, and through, the experience of being a woman, and which must then "speak" to women in a specific discourse. The distinctiveness of a "female" tradition is not the focus of my argument.

> The heroine must be exquisitely, unimaginably beautiful, though two chapters are usually devoted to the description of her charms, or, as we should word it, "her transparent loveliness;" on the subject of her eyes being black or blue, we find nearly a division of authorities, and therefore do not dare to decide on a question of such delicate importance, but with the consent of all copies we venture to read of her figure "tall and slender." She must be an orphan (if a foundling, so much the better), left mysteriously in the care of some opulent and noble family, who most unaccountably (considering their character for prudence) suffer her to board and lodge with them, and water her geraniums till the decisive age of sixteen…" (42)

Exaggeration and melodrama, while they are ultimately entertaining, serve a more serious function in Gothic novels by women. Hyperbole provides a safe vehicle for conveying meaning, undermining patriarchal ideology and illustrating the carceral nature of domesticity experienced by upper and middle-class women in the late eighteenth century. By dramatizing and exaggerating social constructions, hyperbole defamiliarizes[2] the familiar space of the domestic, creating a satisfying fantasy for women wherein the heroine rebels against patriarchal authority, most often by running away from the paternal home and only returning to it when it has been made safe.

The need for a "safe vehicle" to convey meaning is abundantly clear when one examines female Gothic texts against the background of the social culture in which they were created. Upper and middle-class women were enclosed ideologically within the bounds of the domestic space, held there by laws and social expectations. Women's roles were reinscribed by the social shift from feudalism to capitalism with the result that women were assigned a "separate sphere," as Kate Ellis (ix-xv), Diane Hoeveler (5, 30) *et al* note. The idealized middle-class home was ideologically distant from the "fallen" world of commerce, a "separate sphere" that became a useful ideological and political tool that kept women in their "proper" place, protected from the world as they tended to the happiness of their husbands and children. Home was supposedly a refuge from the dangers of the outside world, but, paradoxically, this place of safety was a threatening and dangerous place in itself. The ruined castle of the Gothic novel metonymically represents the fear of the home. Domestic ideology invades the Gothic because the heroine's journey takes her away from the site of domesticity then returns her to it.

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[2] Defamiliarization is a key term of Russian Formalism. Viktor Shklovsky used the term to describe the quality of artistic perception and literary discourse that disrupts ordinary perception. Defamiliarization distinguishes literary from ordinary language, but also refers to a dynamic within literature that allows literary development and change. It also applies to literature's ability to disrupt the dominant ideas of society through its representation of them.

The idea of the domestic sphere has been attacked in recent criticism that revises the notion of separate spheres (Grundy). I do not contend that women were literally placed and kept in their homes, but that contemporary ideology at the end of the eighteenth century, when Gothic fiction begins to appear on a wide scale, posited that the "proper" place for women was within the domestic space. Ideology exerts an insidious and subtle pressure to conform and is conveyed through various media. A modern correlative would be women's magazines that point out women's inadequacies (everything from lank hair to fat thighs to poor sexual performance), tell women what they should be (powerful career women, perfect wives and mothers), and claim to hold between their glossy covers the answers for correcting those inadequacies and conforming to the ideal. A healthy dose of domesticity is included in the form of household hints and recipes just to remind women that they are always already domestic subjects who should not stray too far from tradition. While women do not (usually) govern their lives by the advice in women's magazines, or conduct books, they do feel the pressure exerted to conform.

Historical examinations of cultural ideologies must be subject to a certain amount of speculation and generalization, and skepticism, about exactly how ideology was enacted in the historic time. In the case of literary criticism, cultural ideology and how it is portrayed in literature is a matter of subjectivity—the way it is perceived at a given time may not concur with its perception at another time. Literary criticism is also subject to trends; the study of women's writing is a case in point. We once read women's novels of this period as a means for women to police other women by promoting the doctrines of conduct books. This approach has changed so that every novel becomes an instance of subversion. In their own time, these novels were read for plot and language, and, being pre-Freudian, reviewers did not conduct psychoanalytic readings. Undoubtedly modern "conduct books" and novels will provide future critics with a plethora of conflicting ideologies and the opinions about how they are enacted socially. In any event, novels that are worthy of intense examination will be complex. Certainly the Gothic novels under discussion are in that category as they present female perspectives on the struggle between competing cultural ideologies and how they affected women.

I contend that Gothic novels by women present a coded feminist discourse that employs a covert subtext to criticize the patriarchal order, offering its contemporary readers an escape from the oppressiveness of patriarchy. Through this coded discourse, which we may read as palimpsest, the modern reader can examine the carceral nature of late eighteenth-century domesticity. The surface tale of the beautiful young woman held prisoner by her autocratic male guardian is undercut by the obscured critique of a patriarchal social culture that restricts women, juridically and through public attitude, to a space socially constructed to be appropriately feminine. Gothic texts by women offer both observation and criticism of the restrictive socio-political structures of home, marriage and maternity. In exploring my hypothesis, I will, through my examination of social history and its portrayal in female Gothics, challenge modern criticism's belief that motherhood, woman's ultimate domestic role, was held in high esteem in the late eighteenth century.

Although female Gothic novels typically are not considered revolutionary, they are progressive in that they challenge the patriarchal social structure and, even as they document female complicity, they are curiously empowering for the female reader. Female Gothic authors allow their readers to examine their own situations as social and political subjects by comparing them to the situations of Gothic heroines. The Gothic story, by providing a fantasy feminized domestic space, empowers its female readers by offering an alternative to patriarchal ideology that explores the heroine's desire for freedom. This freedom is figured in Radcliffe's novels as the heroine's escape from the patriarch. In Fenwick's text women's freedom is embodied in the figure of Caroline, who lives independently, in sharp contrast to Sibella who lives in her uncle's microcosm of social ideology. However, Lee's novel portrays feminine freedom as something sought at great cost but that is ultimately unattainable. Thus, these female-centred novels form a substantial contribution to public opinion, and hence to the social changes, of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Female Gothic novels address the vast scope of issues that affected women in the late eighteenth century, including those under discussion in this dissertation: the laws and customs that oppressed women, especially those concerned with property and inheritance; the prison of home, and the paradox of violence committed against women within the "safe" space of the domestic sphere; and maternity, which was (is) as much a social construction as femininity and is of critical interest to the heroine who must recover her lost mother. I will examine these concerns, as well as the female Gothic novel as palimpsest, in the representation of domesticity in particular female Gothics, including Sophia Lee's *The Recess, or A Tale of Other Times* (1783-85), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysterious of Udolpho* (1794) and Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy, Or, the Ruin on the Rock* (1795).

I have selected these novels for their similarities as well as their differences, not just in plot and characterization but in their feminist stances. I see these texts as incorporating different forms of feminism, forms that certainly were not identified in the eighteenth century, but to which we now ascribe definitions. I consider Radcliffe the paradigm for the Gothic novel by women because of her pre-eminence in the genre, and view her as a cultural feminist, who, though she appears complicit with the conventional structuring of female identity, scripts heroines who attempt to redefine their own domestic spaces within the existing social structure in terms that meet their own needs. Radcliffe's heroines escape the patriarch but return to a safely feminized version of the paternal home after they search for their mothers. Eliza Fenwick is a liberal feminist in the mode of Mary Wollstonecraft, pointing out the ideological oppression of women through socio-political structures. Her heroines, Sibella and Caroline, are a study in similarities and contrasts; Sibella, like Caroline, is intelligent and has an independent nature. Sibella reveals the dangers of restrictive patriarchal ideology while the figure of

Caroline advocates autonomy for women. Sophia Lee's feminism is somewhere between Radcliffe's and Fenwick's, though leaning toward Radcliffe's cultural feminism. Lee accepts the socio-political status quo, though she challenges its oppressiveness in the politically-charged situation of her heroines and their tormentor, Queen Elizabeth. Lee's *Secresy* may be defined as a historical novel with Gothic elements, but the enclosure of Sibella in the gothic castle by her guardian seems to cast her as a Gothic heroine.

Female Gothic and the Law

A dominant motif of female Gothic novels is the effect on women's lives of the patriarchal legal system, especially the ways in which marriage, property and inheritance laws affected women. While some women were able to support themselves, the majority of women, particularly in the middle- and upper-classes, were dependent on a male relative for subsistence. Laws that purported to protect heiresses, such as the Hardwicke Act, in reality were established to protect property and its conveyance through the female body. Gothic texts, and novels of other genres, by female authors incorporate the legal issues surrounding women and reveal how vulnerable women were because of them.

The examination of law as it is represented in eighteenth-century fiction generally excludes the Gothic or makes only brief references to it. The legal and social oppression of women is understood as a "given" without specific examination of the law or customs that facilitate that oppression. Criticism of Gothic texts generally restricts discussions of legal issues to a reference to primogeniture or the Hardwicke Act. Whereas finances and entitlement to inheritance are important concerns of Gothic heroines, the significance of their incorporation within a fictive portrayal of women's lives is generally overlooked. Kate Ellis notes in *The Contested Castle*, that in the eighteenth century a "fortune that fell into female hands would legally become the property of a heroine's husband upon her marriage" (112). While this was generally true in the eighteenth century, an exception to the law could be made, albeit with difficulty. However, it was not an incontrovertible point of law in the times in which female Gothics are often set. For example, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set in the sixteenth century; the novel's heroine, Emily, is much more autonomous in terms of property ownership than were her contemporary readers.

One of the most significant aspects of the inclusion of legal issues in female Gothic is its concomitant occurrence with the temporal displacement of the story itself, the latter being one strategy women writers of Gothic novels employ to effect a covert censure of their own social culture. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in particular, employs temporal displacement and inheritance law to great effect. Emily provides an excellent example of a woman attempting to control her fortune and her life, and offers something of a female fantasy to contemporary readers in which a young woman can exercise the freedom, even after marriage, to control her own property. By incorporating accurate details of sixteenth-century inheritance law, Radcliffe establishes an indictment of the patriarchal legal system that oppressed her contemporary female audience. The novel's contemporary readers must have noted the differences in property ownership between the two eras but modern critics tend to overlook those differences.

The Prison of Domesticity

It is important that I clarify my use of "domestic" in this discussion. I refer to the social construction of what is appropriately feminine, particularly restricted mobility, financial dependence, denial of a political voice, sexual repression and the attainment of "accomplishments" instead of an academic education. There is a distinction between masculine and feminine domestic spheres and it is important to avoid thinking of the domestic in modern terms as only those things that denote household activities. For example, in the eighteenth century trade was considered "masculine," including the purchase of household culinary items, an activity we might today consider a domestic duty most often performed by women (Dannehl). While women in the eighteenth-century did go about in the streets to shop, the idea of commerce, even when it involved the domestic, was considered a masculine pursuit. The difference lies in the ideology of commerce and trade (masculine, dealing with business) versus shopping (feminine, trivial).

It is paradoxical that the restrictive domestic space may have offered a peculiar form of empowerment to late eighteenth-century women writers that allowed them to criticize the patriarchal social order that confined them. The Gothic novel is, I believe, the form that gives the most voice to women's situation, for it allows them to explore in relative safety areas that are otherwise forbidden to them — politics, law, intrigue and sexuality. The genre reflects the life lived within the domestic sphere through its metaphoric representation of the invisible walls that imprison women. It challenges women's domestic role and subverts traditional notions of femininity, using the Gothic "construction," that is the castle, tower or abbey, as an extended metaphor for the repressive domestic sphere. The tenebrous walls of the Gothic ruin give form to the eighteenth-century's restrictive laws, social dictums and women's own apprehensions.

The domestic sphere which is to contain and protect the ideal domestic woman is, ironically, often itself a site of physical danger. Being 'locked in the castle' carries the threat of physical violence as one of the means of female oppression. Perhaps the most insidious form of physical dominance perpetrated against women in the eighteenth century, and threatened if not actually accomplished against Gothic heroines, is rape. In a social economy that placed a high value on a woman's chastity, rape was more than a physical assault; it destroyed her value in the marriage market. Furthermore, even knowing about rape was perilous, as that knowledge corrupts innocence. Rape, in female Gothics, is incorporated as "an undefined representation of heroinely terror" which, because of the constraints on female virtue, becomes "*the* intense emotion … that a 'good' female character in a novel can have without threatening her innocence with respect to male lust" (Ellis 46).

Legally, rape presented a paradox. Anna Clark notes, in her study of rape in the eighteenth century, that the justice system in eighteenth-century England was "overwhelmingly concerned with property" (Clark 46). Rape, like theft, was punishable by death, but it was only taken seriously as a crime if it involved male property—a chaste wife or virginal daughter. A rapist was deserving of punishment because he had stolen a valuable possession. However rape also warranted capital punishment because it was akin to murder; chastity defined a woman's value as a person and without it she was worthless. Herein lies the paradox: the rapist deserved punishment because he had stolen an important commodity, but the violated woman lost her credibility along with her chastity, so her testimony became suspect. Rape had a low conviction rate, as juries were reluctant to hang a man on the public testimony of an unchaste, and therefore unworthy, woman (Clark 47).

Male violence towards women, in novels as in life, reflects a masculine need to exert absolute power by constraining women, literally or figuratively, within an impenetrable space. There is plenty of such violence in female Gothic novels, particularly Radcliffe's. Paradoxically in the female-centred Gothic fantasy, domestic violence is turned against the hero or other would-be groom who must, in the female Gothic tradition, suffer some sort of wound. His wounding is a metaphoric sexual violation that feminizes him and makes him "safe" for the heroine. This reinscription of the masculine allows the Gothic heroine, and by extension her female readers, to take control of the domestic sphere, albeit fictively. What becomes apparent is that the fantasy fulfillment of the female Gothic novel suggests a "valorizing" of "the private female world of the home" which "fictively destroyed the public/juridical masculine world" (Hoeveler 5).

Maternity

The phantasmagorical destruction of the masculine in favour of the reified feminine domestic sphere demands that the heroine recover her lost mother; in doing so she discovers herself. The mother's body is absented from the text at the moment the daughter achieves sexual maturity. The heroine cannot exist as a vulnerable and threatened woman in a narrative about sexual danger if her mother exists to protect her. However, there is more to the effacement of the maternal body than a good narrative fit. The heroine's need to recover/discover the feminine suggests that the idealized domestic woman, including her maternal role, is an unsatisfactory patriarchal construction that is upheld as an ideal state in late eighteenth century conduct books and pamphlets. However, the materiality of women's lives contradicts the valorization of the maternal.

The contradiction between maternal ideology and material reality is captured in female Gothic novels by reconfiguring parental roles, initially disposing of the mother in a recreation of the paternal order's abjection of the maternal body. She is redeemed by being examined and re-examined in the daughter's reconstruction of the domestic sphere. Female Gothics defamiliarize the domestic sphere, including maternity, by disordering it and making it seem strange, thereby undermining the authority of the patriarchal social structure, presenting it as odd and threatening. Gothic women writers challenge the patriarchy that idealizes motherhood and present it as a threat to the heroine; they also challenge the notion of ideal motherhood whose value to the state is extolled in contemporary conduct literature. By removing the body of the mother and making the father's law pre-eminent in an age when motherhood was being idealized, female Gothics reveal the conflict between ideology and material reality and thus expose the prevailing ambivalent attitude toward motherhood. Heroines like Julia and Emilia (*A Sicilian Romance*), who are raised by surrogate mothers, expose the bleak truth of maternity in which mothers can be replaced easily by employees or relatives while the autocratic patriarch remains in control. The heroine's attempts to recover her mother suggest a biological imperative in having the "real" mother, a need that is not always satisfactorily resolved.

Interestingly, as Hoeveler and Miles also note, the recovery of the maternal is enacted similarly to the '*fort-da*' game described in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (12, 13, 43).[3] Jacques Lacan interprets the game through his own theories of the

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[3] *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is one of Freud's most speculative texts. He posits that the 'death instinct' is a type of biological inertia wherein living matter strives for non-existence. He arrived at his theory by considering repetition, reaching the conclusion that the repetitive acts of neurotics were an attempt to

Imaginary and the Symbolic, which correspond roughly to Freud's primary and secondary processes, as Robert Miles explains (104-05) and from whom I borrow the following explanation. The Imaginary is a world of presence, plenitude and immediate gratification, and is the time when the child's narcissistic wound (the separation from the mother) is inflicted. The Symbolic is characterized by lack, language, substitution and deferred gratification and parallels the formation of the Oedipus complex. The child is plunged into the Symbolic order, a world of difference and always deferred pleasure, where presence is always elsewhere, "just as, in language, meaning is circular and regressive: one definition (one substitution) merely refers to another, and so on, *ad infinitum*" (Miles 104). Lacan defines the process of deferral as "desire," which begins with the appearance of the Oedipal *Nom-du-Père* whose "law" (incest taboo) splits the child from the maternal body. Language and the Symbolic order make up the world of difference in which the "phallus" represents the narcissistic wound (the sense of loss) as well as representation itself.

According to Lacan, the moment of transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is the "mirror stage" of development and is instrumental in the realization of the "I"

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restore mental equilibrium. However, his theory was shattered by the observation of repetition where the pleasure principle did not operate, such as the "*Fort-da*" game. Freud noticed his grandson playing with a toy, throwing it away and then retrieving it, vocalizing "o-o-o" when the toy was out of sight and "da" when he retrieved it. Freud interpreted the baby's utterances of "o-o-o" as "*fort*," which means gone; "*da*" means there. Freud related the game to the mother's continual disappearance and reappearance; in the game the child substitutes the toy for the mother, experiencing pleasure at its reappearance and enjoying a sense of mastery. Beneath these rational compensations operates an irrational motivation, which Freud designated as "primary narcissism," a time in the child's life controlled by the primary processes, which are pre-verbal, sensory and pleasure-directed. The "*fort-da*" game is an instance of primary narcissism. When the reality principle, which is distinguished by language, exerts itself, the child is thrown into a world of substitutions, a world of absences and deferred gratification. The child copes with the mother's repeated absences with the "*fort-da*" game. Primary narcissism in a child is not problematic; however, when it exists within an adult with no compensating pleasure, it appears that there is some other drive at work in the unconscious. (Miles 102-04).

(Lacan 382).[4] The mirror image the child perceives is a "misrecognition" (*méconnaissance*) of the self as a "whole" (Lacan 385), since the mirror's reflections, rather than "the thing-in-itself ... is axiomatically part of the substitutive, the Symbolic order" (Miles 104) and recalls the state of plenitude from which the child has been separated. The specular image is a fantasy construction, or *gestalt*,[5] an ideal figure with which the child identifies. Thus, the mirror stage represents a primary alienation between the child and her own self-image, which will affect all of her future relationships. Lacan's interpretation of Freud's "*fort-da*" game focuses on the emergence of the realization of difference, which makes language possible. The game of symbolic loss and recuperation is significant, in psychoanalytic theory and female Gothic novels, because it is symbolic, and not because of what is lost and regained (the maternal body). The game thus announces the child in the process of entering the Symbolic.

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[4] Lacan's theory of the mirror stage of development explores the "formation of the *I* as we experience it in psychoanalysis" ("Mirror Stage" 382). The infant's first awareness of the self is an awareness of fragments — the baby's hand or toes pass through her field of vision, and she gradually learns to control the movements of the parts of herself that she can see until she can move her hand to grasp her toes. The child gains an awareness of her whole self as the sum of those parts when she sees her reflected image. Lacan stresses that the mirror must be understood as an object reflecting all senses and emotions. The mirror stage marks the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. The recognition of the reflected image as the image of oneself is an *identification*, a conception of self Lacan labels the *imago*, but the child's perception of herself as a "whole" subject is a misrecognition. The human subject is not a being born with its own identity, but is created in the awareness of others' perceptions, conceptualized when it is reflected back as another's desire. The child develops an awareness of the connection between self and reflected image, and between reflected image and the reality reflected in the mirror. The recognition of the self as an image is the lowest order of self-recognition and develops before language defines "I," which is the "Ideal I," and is also the source of secondary identifications. The mirror stage is thus a function of the *imago* whose purpose is to establish the relationship between the subject and her reality. The mirror stage presages the subject's alienation with her own self-image; after passing the mirror stage, the subject is able to conceive of the self only in the fictional terms defined by society, a paradoxical step necessary for the greater alienation that occurs with the acquisition of language.

[5] *Gestalt* psychology was founded by Max Wertheimer in 1912. An illustrative example of it is the phi phenomenon which creates the illusion of movement by presenting visual stimuli in rapid succession. The basic premise of *Gestalt* psychology is that conscious experiences and perceptions are more than the sum of their parts. It has affinities with structuralism — the content of the conscious experience can be analyzed into its basic elements. Its contribution to the field of psychology was the emergence of humanism and cognitive psychology.

The significance for the female Gothic of these psychoanalytic theories resides in the "insertion of the Oedipus complex into [the] '*fort-da*' game" which privileges the father, not the mother, as pivotal in the construction of the ego (Miles, citing Elizabeth Bronfen, 105-06). The privileging of the father requires the marginalisation of the mother. According to Bronfen, "the displacement of the mother from the scene of interpretation … simultaneously aestheticises the feminine body as an image of death, while charging it with anxiety" because it is displaced (Miles 106). Thus the absent maternal body becomes the "natural" image of loss, and hence death.

A girl's entry into the Symbolic, the development of her subjectivity, coincides with the advent of sexuality; for eighteenth-century girls, such as Gothic heroines, it is the time when they come of marriageable age. The girl passes from the egocentric realm of the child, under the authority of the mother, into the Symbolic order of the paternal law, the *Nom du père*, and at this time becomes aware of her subject position in the patriarchal social system. This transitional time is accompanied by a sense of separation from the mother, imbuing a sense of loss that becomes associated with the maternal body, which has been superseded (abjected) by the primacy of the paternal law.[6] In female Gothic novels, the entry into the Symbolic realm incorporates the heroine's struggle against patriarchal control through her attempts to recover her lost mother, thereby renovating the domestic sphere. Female Gothics, particularly Radcliffe's work, fascinatingly anticipate Kristeva, Freud and Lacan. Their theories provide an insightful perception of female Gothic, or perhaps more accurately, we should say that female Gothics provide an insightful *pre*-ception of the theories of Kristeva, Freud and Lacan.

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[6] Julia Kristeva suggests that abjection is associated with the "horror" that " is a function of the earliest stirring of the pre-self's separation from the mother." Before the speaking subject recognizes its own separation from other objects, it exists in its distinction between "I" and "not-I." Matter which is outside the borders of the "I" is experienced as the "abject," the "cast off," something of a pre-object. The recognition of the abject represents the subject's initial effort to separate from the mother. That which is cast off is viewed with distaste and horror, reactions that help to situate the "I" as separate. Kristeva asserts that what we experience as "horrible" evokes the early anxiety about the borders of the self, and what exists outside the self, so the separation from the mother, and hence the mother, is associated with horror. The conventions of Gothic "horror" (blood, dead bodies—material things associated with waste and what is cast off) echo the "abject." Our anxieties about materiality and what is cast off must be repressed to allow us to

In female Gothic novels the daughter's attempts to recover her dead mother mirrors Freud's '*fort-da*' game, and reveals her 'primary narcissism' as the loss of the maternal body. The heroine flees the patriarchal figure—the father or father-substitute—but her flight often has incestuous overtones. The Radcliffian heroine is caught at the threshold of the Lacanian Symbolic, the presence of the mother and the lover perpetually deferred by the law of the father, which persists in enforcing the lover-substitute. The dead mother is characterized by sensibility, and the heroine looks inward towards maternal sensibility and outward toward a patriarchal order of repression and deferral (Miles 106-107).

Female Gothic as Palimpsest

The advent of the Symbolic in female Gothics is marked by the telling of the heroine's tale itself, often related as a "found" manuscript whose story is unrelated to the finder of the manuscript. Even though the story is the heroine's, she resists its telling. The distancing of the authorial voice resists entry into the Symbolic Order, as if by refusing to speak she can put off the Law of the Father. The layering of the narrative

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enter the Symbolic. (Williams 72-77). In Gothic novels, the heroine is separated from the mother by the patriarch; the maternal body is cast off by the patriarch, not by the heroine's developing subjectivity.

creates a "double-voiced text."[7] The text has two voices, the narrator's and the protagonist's, but it is also a doubled text in that it conveys two meanings, that of the surface text and of the subtext. Thus female Gothic novels are palimpsests, a term used by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar who discuss the overt text and obscured subtext of nineteenth-century women's writing.

Female Gothics are, on the surface, somewhat formulaic stories about beautiful young heroines (often heiresses) who have a series of (mis)adventures in gloomy old ruins, where they encounter mysteries and danger. Underlying the surface tale is a different sort of text, one which reveals the general condition of middle- and upper-class women in the eighteenth century and which cautiously tells of the carceral nature of women's existence. The incarceration within the female Gothic novel reflects women's anxieties about the space they inhabit. At the same time the text fantasizes a free space for women in the form of the recovered female-centred domestic space. The women authors of Gothic novels create a space for their heroines and readers that is external to the idealized domestic space imposed by a patriarchal society and in so doing they create for themselves a literary space that is outside the male-dominated literary tradition. Gilbert and Gubar assert that women writers thus "managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" (73).

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[7] Double-voiced text: describes the way a literary work reflects the double consciousness of an ethnic or woman writer. Elaine Showalter argues that women's writing should be read as a "double-voiced discourse" following the sociological concept of women as a 'muted group' within their own and dominant male culture. The double status of women's writing produces a double text, which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call the duplicitous or palimpsestic nature of women's writing. Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term 'double-voiced' to refer to words, especially in parody, that contain opposite meanings. (*Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*)

Women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were required to become adept at the art of duplicity in order to convey their messages; they hid behind stylized façades, such as the traditions of the Gothic. They present women's "vital concern with female dispossession" concealed beneath "more accessible, 'public' content" (Gilbert and Gubar 72). This does not suggest that male writers do not also conceal revolutionary ideas behind a false front of genre. But as Gilbert and Gubar explain, "there are powerful paradigms of male intellectual struggle which enable the male writer to explain his rebelliousness" so that "he conceals his revolutionary energies only so that he may more powerfully reveal them" (74). Women writers such as Radcliffe and Lee, on the other hand, use concealment as an authorial strategy, not a gesture, and struggle against the lack of a viable female culture and the admonitions of a censorious (to women) society. The "evasions and concealments of their art are therefore far more elaborate than those of most male writers" (Gilbert and Gubar 75).

Certainly not all women authors of Gothic fiction employ such covert strategies in their writing—Fenwick and Dacre come to mind. And we cannot know with certainty if those who used 'evasions and concealments' did so knowingly. However, Gilbert and Gubar note that "many of the lost or concealed truths of female culture" have been hidden from us until recently (75). Discerning women's writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by looking at it against their social context will reveal the "'subterranean challenges' to truths that [women] writers…appear on the surface to accept," challenges examined by women scholars including Patricia Meyer Spacks, Elaine Showalter, Kate Ellis, Anne Mellor and Diane Hoeveler (Gilbert and Gubar 75). The examination of women's writing reveals empty spaces, or recesses, created by the expression of the experience of women in a culture and a literary tradition that is defined by a male paradigm. The deciphering of those texts, and their duplicity, has implications for the reader as well.

Duplicity re-orders reading by making the reader fill in the gaps in the text. Unlike Walpole's novel, which accumulates details to construct the moral of the story for the reader, female Gothics encourage the reader to guess and surmise. Who is singing, who is playing music, who kidnapped whom? What secrets are contained in the hidden manuscript? Sometimes a text double-guesses the heroine—the reader knows there is a secret, when the heroine does not (ie, Sibella, Matilda and Elinor)—leaving gaps to be filled by the reader. By requiring the reader to fill in the text's lacunae, the author establishes a dialogue with the reader, and it is thus that the female Gothic novelist "speaks" to her female audience.

It is not surprising that women writers would use the Gothic as the genre most suitable for their authorial voice. The setting of the Gothic novel — the Gothic ruin/abbey/dungeon — affords a remarkable opportunity for articulating states of mind, of the authors, their heroines and their contemporary readers. As David Miall notes, Gothic architecture appeals to the sublime, "to the forces of vastness, power, obscurity and terror," in the terms of Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), (345). These 'forces' are also characteristics of government and patriarchy (from a woman's point of view during the time under discussion), and describe both the socio-political and natural aspects from which the heroine and her author flee. The heroine is terrorized by the patriarch and attempts escape. The labyrinth of the Gothic edifice gives tangibility to the restrictive laws and social attitudes of the patriarchal social structure.

Prospect

Eighteenth-century women writers were, like their heroines and readers, domestic subjects, their existence and discourse restrained by patriarchy, yet women writers were successful and prolific authors who portrayed and critiqued their world in a variety of genres. While some women writers, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Eliza Fenwick rail against the status quo and advocate change, others, like Radcliffe and Lee employ more restrained, even covert, strategies to critique their society without overtly demanding change and so appear complicit with the gendered conventions of their social culture. By submerging meaning in their texts, women like Radcliffe, Lee and Fenwick create palimpsestic texts that offer the modern critic some insight into the world they inhabited. They used to their own advantage the very conventions that oppressed them to counter the patriarchal system that defined their positions and restricted them to the domestic sphere.

In writing their Gothic novels, Radcliffe, Lee, Fenwick and their sister authors script for us a text that describes the social culture of the late eighteenth century as it pertains to women. Contemporary reviews focused on plot and "elegant language" and often criticized the authors for their historic inaccuracies. Modern readers of Gothic texts can see beneath plot and language to read the subtext that reveals the carceral nature of women's lives in the late eighteenth century. We can read the inaccuracies of historical detail as an authorial strategy to illustrating the disadvantaged position of women in the patriarchal socio-political and socio-historical realms.

The Gothic genre is appropriated by women authors who follow Horace Walpole; they adhere to his conventions while improving the genre by giving it greater socio-political and psychological depth. Walpole uses supernatural apparitions to teach a moral lesson, while most women writers rationalize the supernatural (Charlotte Dacre is an exception) and establish the patriarch as the manipulating force behind the heroine's travail. The development of the maternal character also differs in female Gothics. Walpole's maternal figure is a submissive woman willing to yield to her husband's plan to divorce her so he might father the next generation of his familial line on another, younger, woman. In the female Gothic, the mother, whose usefulness is at an end, is abjected by the patriarch and she is either dead or locked up somewhere. In either case, the heroine must recover her mother in order to complete her own journey of self-discovery. As fanciful and imaginative as are the plots of female Gothics, at their core is an element of realism that communicated to their contemporary female audience.

Chapter 1

She'll Get it in the End: Property, Marriage, Inheritance and the Gothic Heroine

What is most evident in Gothic novels by women is a warring between tradition and new social practices, and the precariousness of women in both circumstances. The development of a new type of family in the eighteenth century led to less emphasis on the practical functions of economic production and greater involvement with emotional connections than had been the case in previous eras. Relationships between men and women were complicated not only by social values, but by the contractual aspects of marriage. As bourgeois women lost the role of co-provider in the family and their leisure became a symbol of their husbands' success, their economic dependence placed them at risk and confined them ideologically within the domestic sphere. Independent women were described as unnatural, or "unsex'd."[8] As land continued to be conveyed by means of the female body, difficulties arose surrounding the appropriation of the means of conveyance. The act of marriage, and its attendant financial transactions, could no longer be trusted to an act of faith or local practices and had to be legislated by Church and State, begetting both the Marriage Act of 1753 and the legal recognition of the ecclesiastical marriage ceremony.

The Marriage Act was one of the first social products of eighteenth-century political economy, associating marriage and national wealth through the production of an industrious working class. Since the Act covered all classes, its effect on middle- and upper-class women was less to assure the propagation of the species and more to ensure the economic insecurity of women, which was sure to keep them dependent on their husbands and thereby in their proper domestic space. The laws that ensured provision for widowed or abandoned women were established to protect the State by ensuring that lone women were supported privately by their families rather than by public institutions. The laws governing women, both publicly and privately and including property rights, were established to maintain the absolute authority of male hegemony. That they did so by suppressing women is both intentional and incidental. By making women as dependent as possible, the State ensured and maintained the patriarchal structures that governed the nation.

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[8] Richard Polwhele's satiric "The Unsex'd Females" (1798) is a critique of the feminist principles of Mary Wollstonecraft and her followers, whom Polwhele attacks, not for what they are, but for what they are not. He considers them unsexed and unfeminine because they are immodest, unsentimental or insubordinate. He asserts that women must provide an infallible model of chaste, sentimental and deferential femininity. Polwhele's main focus in "The Unsex'd Females" is to maintain the distinction of gendered roles, although his agenda is bound to many others. One point is abundantly clear, however, and that is that, to ensure that men and women adhere to their respective gendered roles, they must inhabit separate spheres.

So long as eighteenth-century women, including Gothic heroines, lived under patriarchal authority, their personal freedom and control over their own property were constrained. This is not to suggest that *all* women lived only in severely restricted circumstances. Certainly many women, including Sophia Lee and Eliza Fenwick, earned their own way and lived quite independently. My discussion of Gothic heroines and eighteenth-century women and their property will centre around eighteenth-century law as it is reflected in Gothic texts and will focus on general truths. I will offer considerable historic legal information as a background to the ways in which the effects of contemporary law on women underlie many Gothic novels, shaping the actions of the heroines and other characters. In particular, I will show the legal context within which Fenwick, Radcliffe and Lee wrote.

Women and Property

The inclusion of legal issues in Gothic texts illustrates the effects of law on the individual. Moreover, by the comparison of eighteenth-century law with the laws of earlier times that several novels offer, Gothic fiction covertly challenges the restrictive laws that bound the novels' contemporary female readers. It is apparent that Radcliffe, Fenwick and Lee were well aware of the legal issues affecting women and included them in their novels. Ann Radcliffe, in particular, incorporates these legal issues through discussions about money and property in the concerns of her female characters, notably Emily (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*) and Ellena (*The Italian*). Emily asserts herself to retain control of her property, rejecting her uncle's plans for her to marry Morano in favour of the mate she selects for herself. She contests the patriarch by renovating the domestic sphere, thereby pushing for a more autonomous legal role, symbolically proposing a more autonomous role for the text's readers.

Within the private life of the individual — the domestic sphere — women were usually under the authority of a central male figure — a father, husband or oldest brother. In the public realm — the social sphere — the patriarchal legal system replaced the autocratic authority that ruled the private space. Although a shift in philosophical thinking toward marriage occurred during the eighteenth century, according to Stone, favouring companionate marriage and an enclosed nuclear family, ostensibly giving women more of a voice in choosing their husbands, the decidedly patriarchal legal and social systems still restricted women. Despite the shift toward affective unions, women of the upper- and middle-classes were still very much considered part of an exchange of property between two men, an ideology that continued to govern dower into the nineteenth century.[9] Women were very vulnerable because of their limited autonomy, dependent on a patriarchal figure for their livelihood, and governed by laws that were confused and confusing. When the Gothic heroine triumphs over the patriarch's economic control over her, she supersedes the role of the ideal, submissive eighteenth-century domestic woman, and in the process offers a fantasy of feminine power to her contemporary readers.

The Gothic heroine is most often of a propertied class, which may appear to give her some autonomy and power of her own, but as the means of conveying property through marriage, it is also her liability, because, being female, she has no direct access to the family fortune. Emily is perhaps the best example of a heroine determined to control her own destiny and her own fortune. She challenges her guardian's efforts to wrest her fortune from her, seeks financial advice, and, having regained her property, manages its dispensation. It must be remembered, however, that Emily lives in the sixteenth century, and her possession of her property contrasts with the experiences of the text's eighteenth-century female readers. It is this contrast which is important, and which must have struck a chord with the novel's contemporary readers.

Ellena is an exception to the propertied heroine. Her family, though never illustrious, "was decayed in fortune," and she must work to earn a supplementary income (9). Her work, embroidering silks, is a domestic (feminine) pursuit, retaining her within the domestic sphere. Although she is an independent "working woman" she must restrict herself to suitably domestic endeavours and must conceal the fact that she works to support herself and her aunt or face the shame of being thought unwomanly. Money and property mark the heroine's association with her family and her class. The presence within the text of issues of money, property and class addresses the eighteenth-century reader's situation in terms of finances and dependence and the attendant practical considerations of being unpropertied. A reversal of fortune for a woman in the eighteenth century carried the most serious, potentially fatal, consequences.

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[9] The Dower Act of 1833 marked "a transition from an earlier period in which married women's property was governed principally by so-called private law rules to a later period in which it was governed by statute" (Staves, *Property* 5).

Unlike the real-life woman who must worry about her future, the Gothic heroine, while threatened by the absence of property and money, is often carefully protected by her author, who provides money and important documents in hidden spaces and from unexpected sources, surrounding the practical aspects of the plot with an air of fantasy. The heroine, and the other virtuous characters of the Gothic text, are most often independent of the vagaries of the marketplace. Gothic villains, such as *Udolpho*'s Montoni, in contrast, are often caught up in materialism and the struggle to accumulate property and maintain the status associated with it. The association of the villain with the pursuit of money marks the physical endeavours required to accumulate wealth as evil, or at least as undesirable, hence Ellena's concern with being shamed by her industry. Emily, who inherits her property, is free of the taint of having to work for her money.

The dissociation of the heroine from the means of production is informed by the need to maintain the heroine's innocence. Venturing beyond the cloistered space of the domestic sphere into the world of commerce would bestow upon the heroine an undesirable worldliness that would attach to her the stigma associated with women who exchange services for money. Ellena does so very genteelly by "embroidering silks," an acceptably feminine (domestic) activity. Clearly, social ideology dictates that middle-class and aristocratic women are not meant to encroach upon the world of commerce, but must remain ensconced within the home. Ellena maintains a distance from the marketplace by disposing of her silks to the "nuns of a neighbouring convent" (9). Not only is Ellena separated from the commercial transactions of selling her work, she shrouds herself from the "contempt" of public knowledge of her industry by wearing a veil "to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her" (9). However, it appears that the nuns, who reap a "high advantage," are permitted to be more astute about the marketplace than Ellena, presumably because they are not "in the market" for husbands. The narrator describes Ellena's employment as doing "honor to her character" and asserts that Ellena's character is the better for knowing the benefits of working (9). Radcliffe's inference is that women working is not undesirable, despite the social stigma attached to it; it has been made so by public opinion and the social customs that restrain women from pursuing practical and worthwhile endeavours to support themselves.

However, further examination of Ellena's industry reveals how problematic her working woman status is in the late eighteenth century. Women's association with the marketplace, in the changing eighteenth-century society, occurs variously as buyer, seller and commodity. Women cannot be distanced from the sexual economy that assesses their worth, regardless of their social position. Aristocratic women have economic value as a means of property conveyance between two families; middle-class women, through their idleness, represent the economic success of their husbands; and working-class women face economic assessment as both worker and sexual commodity (Clark 22). The woman of any class, but especially of the upper classes, who has compromised her virtue has less value. An impoverished woman is often forced to trade sexuality for subsistence, either through marriage or prostitution. A woman of noble birth in reduced circumstances, such as Ellena Rosalba, treads a fine line between seller and commodity. The social and religious emphasis on purity and innocence make women particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Thus, Ellena ensures that her association with the marketplace is not publicly known to avoid the perception of her as dealing in trade.

Even when a domestic pursuit, such as embroidery, affords a means of sustaining the domestic environment, it is intended to remain outside the public sphere if it becomes a way to enter the marketplace. While Radcliffe assures the reader that Ellena is improved by her activity, Ellena complies with the patriarchal order by hiding her association with the market place. Radcliffe both challenges the ideology of the domestic sphere and the domestic woman's imprisonment within it and illustrates the complex relation of women's complicity with, and resistance to, patriarchal ideology. However, she does not, like Wollstonecraft, call for change, but infers its necessity because of 'narrow prejudices.'

The Gothic heroine's association with money and property is hazardous. In eighteenth-century England, a woman's value lay in her beauty and virtue which comprised her capital in the marriage market. The typical Gothic heroine is beautiful, intelligent, talented, rational, possessed of remarkable sensibility and, most importantly, innocent. The overemphasis on innocence and forced economic dependence imprisoned women by shackling them to their domestic roles, the safe and acceptable roles of maiden, wife, mother and widow. For the contemporary female readers of Gothic texts, life marked by dependence on a patriarchal figure must have seemed as tenuous as that of the heroine held prisoner in the Gothic ruin by the villain. Money and property were withheld by male authority, a situation undoubtedly frightening for many women and exacerbated by inheritance and property laws that made it difficult for women to hold wealth of their own. The inclusion in female Gothic novels of the pragmatics of the heroine's financial situation and her concerns with property creates a source of identification for the reader with the heroine.

Legal Realities and Gothic Novels

The incorporation in a novel of the legal issues affecting women in the eighteenth century is no mean feat given the confusing state of the laws of that time. Although contemporary female readers would not all have been acquainted with the letter of the law, they certainly would have felt its effects. Susan Staves cites A.W. B. Simpson as characterizing eighteenth-century English legal history as 'a black hole' (*Property* 196). Lawrence Stone describes marriage law "as it operated in practice in England from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries" as "a mess" (*Divorce* 135). Indeed, exploring points of English law during the time Stone describes is confusing and frustrating. Marriage and inheritance relied on contracts, which belies the notion commonly held at the time that man's power over woman is "natural" since contracts could be drawn in any number of ways and could be written to favour anyone, even a woman. According to Stone:

> It cannot be proved conclusively that in reality the powers of fathers over children and of husbands over wives in the upper and middle ranks...became greater than they had been in the middle ages. But this seems a plausible hypothesis, given the fact that patriarchy for its effective exercise depends not so much on raw power or legal authority, as on

> a recognition by all concerned of its legitimacy.
> (*Family* 151)

The 'recognition of legitimacy' of the power of the patriarch is undermined by the sentiments expressed in female Gothics. The absolute authority of the patriarch is indeed acknowledged as a formidable force, but its legitimacy is questioned by women writers of Gothic novels in their attacks on the laws that ensured patriarchal power. Eighteenth-century laws governing inheritance and marriage were not written and legislated as we are now familiar with jurisprudence. Contracts pertaining to property and marriage seem to have been written according to the desires of individual property-holders, guided by public attitudes and enforced by the opinions and caprices of individual judges.

Inheritance

It is evident that inheritance and property disbursement were not clearly defined, and women were at the greatest disadvantage in the era's melange of legal practices. Inheritance under common law was governed by a set of complex, often contradictory, practices ("Resentment" 194-218). The descent of property from one generation to the next — from father to eldest son — seemed a natural process, but after the 1544 Statute of Wills was established, allowing the alteration of a father's will, natural descent became less certain. Inheritance customs did not change much over the next 150 years. Although common law granted the eldest son the rights to inherit the family estate, the Statute of Distribution of 1670 for intestate succession ruled that the parent's personal property was to be divided equally among the children, which was determined by individual family settlements, often prenuptially, and by will. Primogeniture, giving the eldest son the right to inherit all of his father's land, was largely avoided in settlements and wills in the late eighteenth century as affectionate marriage became the cornerstone of the individualistic family. However it continued to exist as an ideology that granted the eldest son the bulk of an estate in contrast to the lesser portions ceded to his siblings. Primogeniture aided the existence of the class structure and resulted in wealthy eldest brothers and poor younger siblings, a situation that Staves asserts led to resentment by younger brothers of their eldest brothers' superiority and subsequent authority over them (*Property* 196).

Primogeniture is a recurring motif in the Gothic novel, as is the plight of the second son. In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily rejects Valancourt, despite her love for him, when Madame Cheron finds him unsuitable because he is a second son, even though Emily's father looked favourably on her association with him. Valancourt appears to be a villain until he is proven to be honourable. In *A Sicilian Romance* the Chevalier de Menon is a second son, whose father "had left several sons; the family estate, of course, devolved to the eldest" (71). The novel is set "[t]owards the close of the sixteenth century," after the statute of 1544, but primogeniture is still practiced. In Fenwick's *Secresy* Valmont punishes Clement by "demoting" him to the status of second son when Clement refuses to adopt Valmont's view of society. If Clement had remained in Valmont's favour, he would have inherited Valmont's estates as the eldest descendant and if he had married Sibella he would, by law, have been granted Sibella's fortune as well.

To return to the topic of inheritance, eighteenth-century family property arrangements included the "strict settlement," which made provisions for the settlement of annuities or marriage portions on children before they were born. The system maintained the property within the family line and did not deprive children of their arranged inheritances. A father could reward children by giving them more, but he was unlikely, although he could, punish by disinheriting. According to Stone, family rights were clearly defined and preserved against encroachment by other family members and the strict settlement diminished the patriarch's "power to enforce his own will upon [his children] over such critical issues as marriage" (*Family* 243). However, the processes of inheritance and property ownership were not as simple as Stone suggests.

Settlements were contracts drawn up according to the needs of the client, and could vary widely depending on the ability of the conveyancer or attorney writing the contract and the magnanimity of the client towards his successors. The strict settlement was a somewhat fluid arrangement. Specific portions could not be determined for children yet unborn, the conveyancer being unable to determine the number of progeny that might result from the marriage, so land revenues or lump sums could be set aside as portions, possibly with a provision allowing the father to determine the division (Staves, "Resentment" 202). Settlements written prenuptially could be altered by postnuptial agreements, including wills, which could contradict initial settlements. By the time a younger sibling was in a position to receive his or her settlement, the father or heir may have been financially unable to pay and could postpone payment. While younger sons faced the possibility of losing opportunities for marriage, education and careers, for daughters unpaid or delayed portions could result in less desirable marriages or no marriages, and hence little recourse for sustaining themselves. Financial matters such as inheritance and settlement must be of great concern to women with few opportunities for providing for themselves, as is evident by their prominence in Gothic texts by women.

The Gothic heroines under discussion, women of differing eras and variously women who must work or heiresses whose inheritances are withheld from them, dispute Stone's premise that patriarchal power was diminished by inheritance law. Despite legal and social changes, *de facto* young single women were still vulnerable to the caprices of parental authority and to the authority of patriarchal legal practices and social customs. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* presents a young English woman living in France in 1584. By conflating sixteenth-century European law and eighteenth-century English law the novel raises the issue of English women's diminishing right to property and inheritance and clearly shows the disadvantaged position of eighteenth-century women in an increasingly oppressive patriarchal society. Emily is raised by loving and virtuous parents whose deaths place her under the arbitrary authority of her aunt, Madame Cheron, and subsequently her aunt's new husband, Montoni. Montoni expects to benefit from selling Emily in marriage to Count Morano, and so increase his own fortunes by demanding Emily's Gascony estates as the price of his favour.

Emily possesses a strict sense of family obedience, despite its being vested in a character as obviously undeserving as Madame Cheron. When she does submit, it appears to be her choice, making the situation both interesting and frustrating for the modern reader. The contemporary reader, however, more accustomed to the social oppression under which Emily lives, would be more empathetic to her predicament. Her father—her excellent father—has ingrained within her a sense of obligation, duty and obedience. As his death approaches, St. Aubert exacts a promise from Emily to follow his instructions explicitly, then tells her of the money and papers to be found in his closet, instructing her not to read his papers. She asks why and is told by him "that, if it had been right for him to explain his reasons, her late promise would have been unnecessarily exacted. 'It is sufficient for you, my love, to have a deep sense of the importance of observing me in this instance'" (78). The social culture that demands that a woman's behaviour remain above reproach operates to make her adhere to her father's teaching and makes her vulnerable to Montoni's coercion. Clearly, the law, social practice, and public attitude combine to oppress women. Emily therefore upholds values which have become not only redundant but dangerous, and so gives up Valancourt when required to do so and eventually, under coercion, signs her property over to her uncle, even though he has no familial right to it and her aunt did not wish it so.

Both Emily and Madame Cheron/Montoni are concerned with retaining inheritance in the matriarchal lineage. In the light of the historical research of Lawrence Stone, Susan Staves and Kate Ellis, it is evident that Radcliffe's depiction of early modern European property customs is historically accurate. In the sixteenth century money and property did not automatically revert to a husband upon marriage, as it did in the eighteenth century. If a woman did not grant her property to her husband, he would have to appropriate it through other means. Montoni has to kill his wife in order to acquire her property and, not daring to risk imprisonment for murder, which would deprive him of her fortune, he starves her to death to simulate a "natural" demise. Madame Montoni's death posits the loss of fortune through marriage as a metaphorical starvation, the withholding of the necessities of life until the victim slowly but surely succumbs. Middle- and upper-class women, particularly in the eighteenth century, whose fortunes are withheld from them have little opportunity to support themselves in respectable ways and thereby lose, not only the means to live, but the sustaining association with family and class that is conveyed by money.

Montoni's machinations are in sharp contrast to the eighteenth-century practice of a husband automatically assuming his wife's property upon marriage, a custom overturned by the Married Woman's Property Acts of 1837, 1870 and 1882 (Ellis 123, Stone). Radcliffe challenges the laws governing women's separate property and the economics of marriage by blending the practices of two eras, an intermingling that is continued in the reader's perceptions. It is Montoni's right, as Emily's guardian, in both the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, to select a husband for her and to expect to benefit from the bargain he strikes with the prospective groom. Thus, when Emily refuses to sign her inheritance over to him, Montoni attempts to marry her to Morano, who will give him access to her property.

In the sixteenth century, unlike the eighteenth, Morano could not expect to automatically assume control of Emily's property. It was customary, but not required legally, for a woman to grant her property to her husband before marriage, an act many husbands insisted on to establish and demonstrate their authority within the union and as "a proper perquisite of their position as husband" (Palmer 51). Montoni expects just such an agreement:

> Montoni had been interested in his suit, by motives entirely selfish, those of avarice and pride; the last of which would have been gratified by an alliance with a Venetian nobleman, the former by Emily's estate in Gascony, which he had stipulated, as the price of his favour, should be delivered up to him from the day of her marriage. (*Udolpho* 273)

Such a grant would make *her* property *their* joint property, which would allow them to liquidate their assets more easily should the need arise. A married woman could inherit land but could not acquire it on her own separate from her husband, and her husband could dispose of her lands and goods but could not separate her from her property for a period longer than his own life. A widow who had owned land prior to marriage retained the land after her husband's death; if land had been given only to the husband, upon his death his widow retained only one-third of the land for the rest of her life (Palmer 46). Under sixteenth-century law, Emily would not have to give her property to Morano, nor could Morano give it permanently to Montoni. In the eighteenth century however, a woman in Emily's position would lose possession of her property; her guardian would have full control of it. Radcliffe clearly illustrates the disadvantaged legal condition of English women in the eighteenth century as compared to earlier times, depicting property law as one of the ways in which the patriarchal legal structure keeps women in their proper, that is domestic, place.

Common Law

Unlike eighteenth-century women, Emily, in the sixteenth century, once freed from the prison of her guardian's castle and his authority, has legal recourse for retaining control of her estates. Arriving at Chateau-le-Blanc, she makes inquiries of her uncle Mons. Quesnel regarding the state of affairs that he had undertaken for her. Quesnel advises her that the lease of La Vallée has nearly expired and that she can expect to "recover much more of her fortune, than she had formerly reason to expect" (494). Later, Emily discusses her financial situation with the Count De Villefort and consults him on the means of recovering her late aunt's estates. He assures her "that the law would decide in her favour"(495). De Villefort, or more specifically Radcliffe, is correct about this point of law.

Under early modern common law, and continuing through the eighteenth century, there were three types of estates, "estate" referring to real property and the nature and extent of a person's interest in it. A "fee simple" was an estate of inheritance clear of conditions or limitations. It descended to the heir at law, unless otherwise decreed by settlement or will; an "heir at law" was the person, most often the eldest son, who had the right to all lands and tenements of the ancestor. A "fee tail" was a legal or equitable estate limited to a person and his natural heirs, that is, the heirs of his body, and could be further defined as a "fee tail female" or "fee tail male." A fee tail female limited real property to a person and the female heirs of that person's body, while a fee tail male limited real property to a person and the male heirs of that person's body. Literary examples of tailed inheritance occur in the work of Austen and Fenwick. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* fee tail male inheritance excludes all the Bennett daughters from inheriting, ceding the estate to their distant relative, Mr. Collins. In Fenwick's *Secresy* Sibella, who possesses "an unentailed six or seven thousand a year" is considered a "very proper match" for Filmar (II, vii, 81).

A "life estate" was an estate held for the lifetime of a tenant; under common law the dower was a life estate for the life of a widow, a "dower" being the legal right or interest acquired by the wife in her husband's real estate (Staves, *Property*, 235-38). Dowry land was given *'in maritagium,'* a way to give a daughter her share of familial property. Dowry land, and any land a wife inherited at an ancestor's death, remained with her after her husband's death (Palmer 46). If the wife predeceased her husband, she could will the land to someone other than her husband. In any case, possession of the property accounted for much; a person had to physically take possession of the property to own it. All such land conveyances were open to legal dispute and many cases of suits against land heirs are recorded in early modern court records.

Madame Cheron/Montoni's estates, owned before her marriage, could be willed by her to Emily under various of these laws. Montoni could contest the inheritance, or, since he had already established himself as master of the estate, could simply claim it as his own and Emily, not having established herself as the owner, would have to reclaim the land from him. By holding Emily hostage, Montoni could retain the property left to her by his wife. Upon her escape, the safest way for Emily to reclaim her inheritance would be through the courts, and, although court records of the time, as reported by Palmer, reveal many inconsistencies in judicial decisions, the law would most likely 'decide in her favour.'

Marriage and Property

Increasingly in the mid-eighteenth century, women began to retain control of their own property, partly because of judicial changes but also because many women, especially widows, took the precaution of vesting their property in separate trustees before marriage, to limit their husbands' access to it. Self-management of her finances required that a woman have considerable knowledge of financial affairs, but separate trusteeships established by widows were not looked upon very favourably. They were seen as a way to deprive a subsequent husband of his new wife's property and not as a way to protect a woman's financial future. A husband was obligated under common law to maintain his wife and it seemed unfair that a woman could convey away her assets upon entering a marriage and then expect to be supported. In many cases, it was considered fraudulent for a woman contemplating marriage to protect her assets by removing them from her prospective husband's influence. She could establish a trust for the children of her first marriage, but placed herself at considerable legal risk by establishing one for herself, although another person could legally establish a trust for her of separate property.

Staves cites the court records of the case of *The Countess of Strathmore v. Bowes* (1789), the story of whose marriage could have been lifted from the pages of a Gothic novel (*Property* 53-55). Bowes sued the Countess for fraud, claiming that a settlement she had made for her own benefit a week before the marriage, without notice to him, deprived him of his marital rights. The case was judged by Mr. Justice Buller and Lord Thurlow, a "conservative and patriarchal judge" who "did not think much of permitting married women to have separate property and agreed with Bowes that a husband had a right in his wife's property against which fraud could be committed" (53). Bowes was a disreputable lieutenant on half-pay, notorious for his bankruptcy, who had wasted a previous wife's fortune, staged a duel to influence the Countess to marry him, treated her badly, coerced her into signing a deed over to him and had her kidnapped when she tried to escape from him. The Countess obtained an ecclesiastical divorce and the judges decided in her favour because Bowes was such a cad, 'not entitled to much consideration in a court of justice' (54).

Gothic villains seem to be modeled after someone like Bowes. They exhibit the unscrupulousness of a man desperate for money but unwilling or unable to find legitimate means of procuring it on his own. I do not contend that any of the authors I discuss were familiar with the Strathmore/Bowes case in particular, but assert that, since such cases were fairly common, knowledge of similar instances was likely among the upper- and middle-class population. The appearance of these legal issues in Gothic texts is therefore not surprising, since they would have been common knowledge. Furthermore, the inclusion of such incidents in the travails of the heroine helps to establish the link between text and contemporary reader and relates the heroine to the real conditions of women's lives.

No less a cad than Bowes is Clement in Fenwick's *Secresy*, which conducts an indictment of the state of contemporary marriage laws. Sibella's "marriage" with Clement upholds the true faith of the marriage contract, but she is condemned by a society that refuses to grant her respectability and affords it instead to a foolish woman who marries a gigolo, because the latter marriage is performed with all the ceremony required by law. Sibella is a true innocent, but her innocence incorporates a large measure of ignorance. Her uncle has raised her in isolation and her life experience is limited to the classroom instruction she has shared with Clement. She has no notion of the world but nevertheless, in her innocence, she maintains the true meaning and commitment of marriage.

In an earlier time, Sibella's claim of marriage to Clement, and by extension the legitimacy of her unborn child, would take precedence over his marriage to Mrs. Ashburn. Sibella would be a wife and her child an heir, instead of legally defined as whore and bastard, and Clement would be a bigamist. Prior to the Hardwicke Act of 1753, marriage was a loosely, and confusingly, defined union (Stone 30-35). In medieval England, marriage was a private agreement between two families exchanging property and which provided for the bride financially in the case of divorce or her husband's death. Marriages arranged privately by the exchange of promises or consent were considered binding, even without consummation or witnesses (Palmer 42, Bannet 234). If vows were expressed in the present tense (*spousalia per verba de praesenti*) the union was considered a binding marriage, and if the vows were made in the future tense (*spousalia per verba defuturo*), the union became legally binding when consummation occurred (Bannet 234). A church ceremony was an unnecessary expense for the unpropertied, especially since divorce by mutual consent and remarriage were practiced. The Roman Catholic Church assumed control of marriage law in the thirteenth century, asserting the principle of monogamous indissoluble marriage, defining and prohibiting incest, punishing fornication and adultery and legally excluding bastards from inheritance.

In the sixteenth century marriage was more clearly defined and people of property completed several steps towards its solemnization, including a written legal contract between the parents confirming financial arrangements; the verbal exchange of promises before witnesses, called spousals; a public proclamation of banns in church; the wedding in church and consummation of the marriage by physical union (Stone 31). The spousals alone were considered legally binding according to ecclesiastical law, as was any exchange of promises before witnesses. The Anglican Church did not recognize the Roman Catholic innovation but did not institute its own measures, retaining early modern marriage laws unaltered, with matrimonial litigation left to the ecclesiastical courts. As the Anglican Church wielded its power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the laity and the clergy came to understand the spousals as the legally binding step in the marriage process, but civil lawyers continued to recognize only the church ceremony, and it was the civil court which controlled property. Spousals existed in two forms: a verbal promise to marry in the future, an engagement that could be broken if not followed by consummation; or vows expressed before witnesses which were an irrevocable commitment that superseded a later church wedding to someone else.

The canons of 1604 specified that church weddings must be performed between eight in the morning and noon at the place of residence of one of the couple after the banns had been read for three consecutive weeks. People under 21 required the consent of parents or guardians. Marriages performed outside of these strictures subjected the officiating clergyman to serious penalties and were considered illegal but nevertheless were legally binding for life (Stone 32). The result of this confusing legislation was a vigorous trade in illegal ceremonies by corrupt clergy in districts immune from ecclesiastical supervision and elopements to Gretna Green in Scotland where the banns legislation did not apply.

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act established a clear set of laws governing marriage. From 1754 only the church ceremony, not the spousals, was considered legally binding; all church marriages had to be registered in the parish and signed by both parties; all marriages which had been performed illegally according to the 1604 canons were declared invalid; marriages of people under 21 without parental consent were invalid; and enforcement of the law was transferred from the feeble ecclesiastical courts to the secular courts. Fathers, attempting to control their children's marital choices, could stipulate certain conditions in settlements or wills that denied a child all or part of his or her settlement if s/he married without consent. However, it is not certain that such clauses could be enforced. Staves asserts that, under civil and English ecclesiastical laws, "conditions annexed to legacies in restraint of marriage were void because repugnant to the law of nature, contrary to the procreation of children, and detrimental to the commonwealth" (Staves, *Property* 205). The main reason for establishing the Hardwicke Act, according to the government, was to "prevent rich heirs and heiresses of good family from being seduced into clandestine or runaway marriages with their social or economic inferiors" (Bannett 233). Opponents of the Act asserted that the government was changing the meaning of marriage through observance of ceremony and procedure, and that, rather than protecting young women, it would be the ruination of the many women whose marriages would be declared invalid, altering their status from wife to whore and their children's from legitimate heirs to bastards.

I believe the Hardwicke Act was actually a means of protecting property, and thus supported and maintained patriarchal authority over the daughters of the propertied classes and "protected" daughters only insomuch as they were their fathers' property. The support of regulated marriage was important to the political economy of England, as it assisted British prosperity by increasing population. The industry and skill of the country's population "enriched the nation by supplying its wants more abundantly and by producing a surplus of commodities with which to bring in wealth from foreign trade" (Bannett 235).[10] "Marriages were the nation's 'Manufactory for making Children,' and children had become 'a source of wealth'" (Bannett 235). But to be productive, children had to be produced by parents who could maintain and educate them to fill the roles that fit their position within the class-based British society. In such a political climate, women are merely a means to economic and political ends, with the "domestic woman's" position clearly that of the means of production of the empire's next generation and the maintenance of the class system. A woman who weds without consent or without due ceremony, or who bears children outside of that government- regulated institution undermines the state's political ideology.

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[10] The question of population was central to parliamentary debate. The Government and Opposition, though disagreeing on the impact of the Marriage Bill on population, agreed that 'propagation of species' and 'the good of society' were the 'two great ends we should have in view when we make any laws relating to marriage' and 'without a continual supply of industrious and laborious poor, no nation can long exist,

Fenwick's presentation of contradictory marriage practices conflates eighteenth-century custom with early modern tradition, thereby challenging the Hardwicke Act's reconstruction of marriage and the political purposes of the new definition of marriage. When Sibella innocently gives herself to Clement, and they agree to a binding union, they are married according to early modern law. In Sibella's "billet" to Clement she writes "Say I am your's, and you are mine, and sorrow and jealousy will vanish as a mist. You shall go the transported confiding husband" (I, xii, 218). Sibella expresses her intentions to Caroline in a letter before the "wedding" (I, xi). The consummation of their union is confirmed by Clement's letter to Murden (I, xii) and Sibella's letter to Caroline, although the reader does not see that letter but learns of it in Caroline's reference to it (II, i). Murden and Caroline thus stand as witnesses to the marriage should questions arise. Clement's marriage to Mrs. Ashburn, on the other hand, reveals the insincerity with which a marriage is undertaken when money and property are its motivations. It is a legally binding union, because it has been blessed by the pomp and circumstance of a society that privileges property ahead of people. Fenwick's fictive portrayal of the state

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which supply can be got only by promoting marriage among such people' (Bannett 235, citing *Parliamentary History*).

of marriage reveals how the institution of matrimony, part and parcel of domesticity, places women at a disadvantage.

Prospect

It is difficult to say whether the law reflects contemporary social values or if it plays a role in shaping those values. I think it most likely that the relationship between law and social values is reciprocal, both acting upon, and being acted upon by, the other. Confining women, economically and through public opinion, to the domestic sphere assured the nation of an orderly society, with children brought up embracing the values that would make them contributing citizens. The ideological restriction of women to the enclosed space of the home abetted their subjection and supported masculine authority. The interaction of law and public opinion is evident in the sub-texts of the Gothic novels discussed herein. What is revealed in them, and in other writing of the time, is what Eliza Haywood describes as "examples of such events as there is a possibility may happen to herself or to those persons for whom she has the most tender concern" (*The Female Spectator* 139). Economic dependence is fraught with tension, particularly in a time where the alternatives to that dependence were very few. Gothic texts by women incorporate that economic dependence to reveal how keeping women 'locked in the castle,' incarcerated by domesticity, aids the patriarchal order. The texts, and a study of the legal history of the period, reveal a frightening era in female history, not the least of which was a woman's association with domesticity.

Chapter 2

The Domestic Sphere: Elysian Prison

> home is the resort
> Of love, of joy, of peace and plenty, where,
> Supporting and supported, polish'd friends
> And dear relations mingle into bliss. – Thomson
> (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* 1)

> Home is to [women] a citadel of vigilance, not a scene of pleasure or repose: to man it is as a garden, in which he refreshes his weary spirit and exercises his best affections; but to woman this seeming elysium is a school of discipline, which allows not even a momentary relaxation from laborious care.
>
> ("Radcliffe: A Retrospective View, 1824"
> *New Monthly Magazine* 11, No. 46 (1824), 318-19.)

Ellis notes that the view of home in the eighteenth century as a refuge "suggests some anxiety about the safety of the surrounding space, particularly for women" (xi). However, in the changing social culture towards the end of the century the domestic woman, relegated by middle-class idealization to the confines of the domestic sphere, actually had little protection from arbitrary male control or male rage, either inside or outside the home. A new waged labour force drew working class women out of the home and into harm's way, while aristocratic women were at such risk from rape as a means of forcing them into marriage (and thereby passing on family property) that parliament found it necessary to pass the Hardwicke Act. The middle-class idealization of the home, and the image of the domestic woman safely ensconced within it, actually intensified women's predicament. In any case, what was at stake in the confinement of women to the domestic sphere was male power, not female security.

As the quotation from *New Monthly Magazine* above implies, while men could view their homes as an escape from responsibility, for middle-class women home *was* responsibility. Within the late eighteenth-century middle-class home, ideologically at least, the woman exerted authority over familial relations and the education of her children, particularly her daughters, and, as Armstrong states, "under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop" (3). Among the 'qualities of human identity' possessed by the ideal woman, and to be instilled in her daughters, were modesty, deference, delicacy and stoicism, but her most valued asset was her virtue. Her biggest responsibility was to assert a civilizing influence over her domestic sphere which would be carried beyond the walls of home, a responsibility that cast her, ill-prepared, in the role of moral guardian of society.

The Domestic Prison

Female Gothics reveal little of the supposed power of the authoritative matriarch, being employed in presenting the struggles of the young heroine as she attempts to break out of the castle and flee patriarchal control. These texts do, however, reveal the carceral nature of the paternalistic domestic space. For example, in *Secrecy* Valmont's authority over Sibella is most evident in the interior spaces of the castle, the interior space of the home designated as the proper place for a woman. When Sibella is in his study or in her bedchamber, indeed anywhere indoors, she is cowed by him. She finds some small measure of relief from his constant tyranny only when she is outdoors, "conversing with nature." Valmont's patriarchal control over her exists inside, in culture, rather than outside, in nature. The implication is that, despite Valmont's echoing of Rousseau's assertion in *Émile* that dependence is a natural condition for women, blind obedience to patriarchal control is not a natural state.

Over and over in female Gothics, we see the assertion of patriarchal power over the female characters. Even when the paternalistic authority is wielded kindly, it possesses irresistible power. Such is the case with Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, whose father is all benevolence and ultimately all-powerful. St. Aubert is portrayed as a man with saintly characteristics, "his principles…unshaken, his benevolence unchilled" (1). He is actively involved in rearing his daughter and "cultivate[s] her understanding with the most scrupulous care" (6). His edicts to Emily are so strictly obeyed by her they seem to be a form of brainwashing, as subtly administered and as insidious as the social attitudes that contribute to the restriction of middle- and upper-class women to the domestic sphere.

After St. Aubert dies, Emily is imprisoned by Montoni, her uncle by marriage and the antithesis of her benevolent father. Montoni's villainy resides in his knowledge of the absolute power he holds over women. When Madame Montoni refuses to sign her properties over to him, he orders her locked up in "the east turret" where she "may understand the danger of offending a man, who has an unlimited power over" her (305). St. Aubert and Montoni together represent the two faces of the patriarch—the kindly father and the villainous autocrat—both of whom wield absolute authority over the female characters. The heroine must escape from paternalistic control to re-order the home as a female-centred safe domestic space which is what Emily's marriage to Valancourt, a suitably feminized hero, appears to configure.

Before the domestic sphere is reconstructed by the Gothic heroine, home is, to her and her contemporary readers, besides a 'school of discipline,' the carceral space to which patriarchy confines her. The physical structure of the home gives tangibility to the imprisoning constraints placed upon her by the restrictive society in which she lives, the walls of the house standing in for the laws and expectations that keep her in her place. Enclosed within the home, ostensibly to be protected from the world outside, eighteenth-century women were often at the mercy of abusive husbands and spying, gossipy servants, locked in with danger rather than locked away from it. Women's vulnerability arose as much from the patriarchal laws governing their lives as from the disabilities associated with being female. My reference to "disability" is not only to the legal and financial restrictions discussed in Chapter 1. I refer also to the physical danger of being female—rape and other forms of male aggression—and the general social attitudes that designated women as inferior, such as the idea that women possess inferior rational powers of the mind, a notion that many women, like Hannah More, accepted and incorporated in their prescriptive writing. The castles, convents and caves of Gothic texts metonymically represent the fear associated with home.

Women writers were subject to the imprisonment of the home as much as other women, but had a special way of dealing with their constraint. Radcliffe, Lee, Fenwick, Hays, Wollstonecraft and many others wrote, either descriptively or prescriptively, about the domestic subjectivity imposed on women in a patriarchal social culture. The female Gothic novel posits the home as a fortress but exposes its contradictions at the same time. Ellis suggests that Gothic novelists "appealed to their readers not by providing 'escape' but by encoding, in the language of aristocratic villains, haunted castles, and beleaguered heroines, a struggle to purge the home of license and lust and to establish it as a type of heaven on earth"(xii). Hoeveler contends that the encoded female Gothic novel can be read "as the need to privatize public spaces," a reaction to "gender politics" and the "social, economic, political, religious, and hierarchical spaces that bourgeois capitalism—and by extension the patriarchal family—has constructed to contain" women (xiii). Gothic novels by women "write back" to the social and political ideologies of patriarchy and create an alternate fantasy female-centred world that has been purged of danger.

The paradox of the co-existence of security and danger within the domestic space mirrors the doubleness of vision that marks eighteenth-century society, Romanticism and the Gothic novel and is informed by the conflict between aristocratic corruption and the bourgeois idealism that is supposed to protect women by keeping them safely at home. This sense of doubleness—of paradox, double meanings and things being other than they appear—infiltrates the Gothic text, and in the text's representation of life and society presents a doppelgänger image in which marriage is liberating and restricting, husbands are redeemers and jailers, and home is the site of empowerment and imprisonment. Women are at once locked into, and excluded from, the political system, in that they are the mothers of the next generation of imperial subjects, implying the state's vested interest in them, but they are excluded from the socio-political system that constructs the ideologies that constrain them.

The Domestic Woman

The identity of women is caught up in the midst of this double vision which privileges the idealized "domestic woman" and attempts to define her as an asexual yet reproductive woman. Eighteenth-century ideas of women's sexuality, as it is revealed in contemporary novels, reveal certain contradictions. Women are variously portrayed as having voracious sexual appetites (Cleland's Fanny Hill) or being so timid as to faint at the merest hint of a sexual advance (Richardson's Pamela). The heroines of the Gothic texts under discussion are as variously portrayed: Emily is a virginal character who appears to have no knowledge of the threat of male sexuality represented by the unlockable door of her bedchamber; Sibella's unrepressed passion for Clement is the catalyst for her downfall; and Matilda scurries through dark corridors for trysts with her secret husband. The domestic woman is an idealized patriarchal political construction of a woman who fulfills a specific role—tending to the happiness of her husband and children—and who eschews her "natural" inclinations toward passion and an uncontrollable nature.

The female Gothic text's resistance to the domestic woman suggests a struggle between a gendered social construction of identity and a biological imperative. The rise of the domestic woman in eighteenth-century social culture is part of what Armstrong defines as "the paradox that shapes modern culture" (3). The construction of the domestic woman restricted to the domestic sphere arose from Enlightenment reasoning, which excluded women from rationalist critiques (Kelly 6-7). Enlightenment saw "reason" as a means to legitimize middle-class criticism of court government and its apparent artifice, decadence, impulsiveness and unreason. Women, excluded from participating in rationalist critiques, were allied with that which reason criticized, reinforcing the idea that women were more likely than men to be corrupted by other classes. The domestic woman was firmly ensconced in the domestic sphere, safe from the corrupting influences of other classes and from the hazards of the world outside the home.

The domestic woman was ascribed specific characteristics: rote learning, rather than independent thought, was her reason; fancy and imagination were her domain; and her forté was anything ornamental, entertaining or domestically useful that imbued middle-class life with an air of gentility. Her hallmark was idleness. A wife's leisure and a well-regulated home signified male competence, an economic asset in a time when traditional identifiers of reliability were collapsing, making of the female icon a "rallying point for middle-class hostility toward an aristocracy that had lost its capacity for moral leadership" (Ellis xi). The lady of leisure distinguished her middle-class husband from the lower orders who could not afford idle wives. The image of the domestic woman was ideologically useful, particularly to the professional middle-class, in which women stood for the class itself but were actually vulnerable to lower-class violence and aristocratic decadence (Ellis xi, Kelly 7). The masculine construction of ideal womanhood was restricting, but, paradoxically, was exploited by many women writers to gain access to the public, political and professional arenas otherwise denied them. While Gothic texts offer explicit criticism of home, marriage and maternity, domestic ideology invades the Gothic because the heroine's journey eventually takes her back to the domestic and reifies the home and family.

Ideal domestic womanhood is examined, subverted and resisted by Radcliffe, Lee and Fenwick; their Gothic texts mirror contemporary prescriptive writing about what a woman *should* be and reveal the constructedness and contradictoriness of the ideal as well as the challenges and dangers associated with it. Contemporary prescriptive writing exhibits the love/hate relationship of male authority with women. The injunctions of St.Aubert and Valmont are echoes of the teachings of the Reverend John Moir and Dr. John Gregory. Moir writes in *Female Tuition; or, An Address to Mothers, on the Education of Daughters* that "All virtues, all vices, and all characters, are intimately connected with the manners, principles, and dispositions of our women" (34). Gregory, in his *Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, carefully exhorts his daughters to develop every "feminine virtue," and endeavours "to point out those virtues and accomplishments which render you most respectable and most amiable in the eyes of my own sex" (47, 3). Virtue is, according to Gregory, a cornerstone of love, "founded in nature" and the domestic woman's most valued trait (56).

Moir advocates the perpetuation of a chain of obedience, by which I mean that daughters should be obedient to their mothers, who should be obedient to their husbands, who are obedient to the state. It is Moir's opinion that "women, especially, should be accustomed to the earliest habits of subjection and obedience" and that they should be reared from infancy to adhere to these qualities (7). However, in the female Gothic, we see that being obedient can lead to trouble. When Emily obeys her father's instruction not to read his papers, she in effect creates a serious problem that threatens her innocence, the very thing St. Aubert hoped to protect. By burning the papers after having accidentally seen a few words she raises questions about her family, particularly her mother's identity and therefore her own, the accidental discovery having raised suspicions of adultery. Emily cannot address the issue by acknowledging her suspicions, for she, like her contemporary female reader, cannot disobey nor can she afford to compromise her innocence.

Although innocence is appropriate in children, Wollstonecraft asserts that innocence in adults is "a civil term for weakness" (20). She and Hays are in accord in advocating education as the antidote, but it must be an education that is "calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart," thereby allowing "the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent," for "it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason" (Wollstonecraft 21). Reason cannot be developed without the experience that is denied to women in the patriarchal vision of the ideal domestic woman. Gothic texts reveal the chimera that is the constructed domestic woman by revealing the disadvantage under which women struggle if they are too innocent. Emily has to undo the teaching that should have produced the ideal woman, Sibella and Ellinor never attain that ideal state and Matilda's experience undermines the whole philosophy of the domestic woman.

The Gothic heroine is a girl on her way to becoming a domestic woman; she is of marriageable age, on the cusp of being locked into the domestic sphere. She has many of the qualities of the ideal domestic woman; she is innocent, beautiful and accomplished, as likely to be as skilled at lute-playing as sonnet-writing. Yet her accomplishments are generally of little practical use. The heroine exists to experience difficulty and turmoil, not to evade it. Her surroundings and her situation conspire to put her in danger, and the contemporary female reader of Gothic texts could see herself in the heroine's situation. This is not a criticism of the heroine's ineffectualness; rather I maintain that the heroine's situation is akin to the situation in which her contemporary readers were likely to find themselves, trapped by patriarchal constructions of feminine identity and seemingly powerless to affect change.

The heroine's most important attribute, like the domestic woman's, is her virtue. She is uneducated in the ways of the world, and so she picks up her candle and sets off into dark corridors to explore forbidden places and ends up being pursued by the villain who is bent on her ruination. Or she paces endlessly in her chamber with the unlockable door that leads to a secret corridor, and frets over the door's vulnerability instead of attempting to find another refuge. She is unaware of the peril that lurks in the dark spaces of the gothic ruin, of the nature of the masculine desire that is her real threat, knowing only that there is some indefinable danger on the other side of the door.

The anxiety surrounding the need for the Gothic heroine to remain chaste, and hence worthy in a social culture that places economic value on female purity, resounds in Gothic terror. As Ellis states, "[o]ne of the real achievements of the Gothic tradition is that it conjures up, in its undefined representation of heroinely terror, an omnipresent sense of impending rape without ever mentioning the word" (46). Clark asserts that she "found no evidence in … pamphlets, court records, or newspapers that incidents of rape were used to warn women to stay out of public space. Rape was just one of the many ways in which women were oppressed" (3). Yet the fear of rape permeates the Gothic heroine's flight down the dark corridors of the gothic ruin. A properly chaste maiden cannot possess the forbidden knowledge of what men might seek from her. Her flight is away from some nameless *thing*, male lust in the guise of the unknown, and the inability to name the thing increases the heroine's terror.

But there is more to the heroine's angst than the real, or implied, threat of rape. Misogyny expressed as violence towards women is at the core of the danger threatening the heroine and is a topic addressed by the conventions of the Gothic novel which "speak of what in the polite world of middle-class culture cannot be spoken" (Ellis 7). Male violence, including, and perhaps especially, rape, is an issue of power and authority, of a man punishing the female victim for "imposing limits on his male will" (Ellis 46). In Radcliffian Gothics, the imposition of male power is intrinsically bound to economic matters. The villain does not violate the heroine sexually but "turns her innocent, Edenic life into an imprisoned one"; he locks her up in "a space he thinks impenetrable … assuming that before her beauty fades he can transform her body into the capital he needs in order to continue his life of dissipation" (Ellis 46-7).

The locus of the issue of violence in female Gothics is the suggestion that violence is threatened or committed against women to keep them tethered to their proper place. The fear of assault and rape, in the eighteenth century as now, is a fact of life for women which causes us to restrict our movements. Clark suggests that "[t]hese fears and restrictions, however, do not derive from common-sense caution. By limiting our own freedom, we obey the dictates of a myth—a myth which covertly warns us that rapists punish women who stray from the proper place" (1). By identifying would-be rapists as strangers and deviants—or the villains in novels—"this myth enables other men to extort submission from women in exchange for protection; it is the biggest protection racket the world has ever known" (Clark, citing Susan Brownmiller, 1). Hoeveler, too, describes the "protection racket" that is patriarchy, "a system of favors and exchanges according to which one's survival depends on having a powerful protector" (34). For the Gothic heroine and her eighteenth-century reader the cost of the patriarch's 'powerful protection' is submission (or its appearance) to the patriarchal order.

The fear of what could happen in the public sphere works to keep women in the private sphere of the home. Modern studies have proven over and over that rapists are as often friends or acquaintances as strangers, with home as much a site of danger as dark streets; the protection offered by the myth is, at best, illusory. However illusory is the protection offered by male guardianship, it is a necessity for eighteenth-century women. Anything that threatens one's access to that protection, such as rape, is definitely to be feared. The female Gothic novel does not specifically name the thing to fear but is impelled by it. The violence perpetrated against the Gothic heroine occurs most often within the interior space of the gothic ruin. She is struck, held prisoner, poisoned, starved and pursued within the domestic space.

The Gothic edifice represents the patriarchal system imprisoning the heroine, whose presence within its gloomy confines represents the transition she must make from innocent girl to mature woman. The labyrinth of the Gothic edifice, in which dark passages lead to ever-deeper interior spaces, suggests the inwardness of understanding the self and the repression of female sexuality. Within the confines of the Gothic castle, the heroine is assaulted by the apparitions of imagined violations in scenes that are intuited as sexual. The heroine does not learn about the nature of her sexuality but instead discovers that the consequences of sexual passion are madness and death. She learns to repress her inner self before her passion can destroy her, and thus remains in a state of perpetual adolescence, with her sexual maturity indefinitely postponed.

The violence surrounding the heroine is not entirely focused on her but it is still irrevocably bound to the feminine. Some of the text's violence is directed toward feminizing the hero, or other male character, to render him "safe," thus portraying violence, or the threat of violence, as an eddy swirling around the sexually innocent heroine. When Morano enters Emily's chamber via the secret staircase, it becomes a pseudo-sexual patriarchal struggle for possession of the heiress. Morano declares his love for Emily and his desire to protect her. Montoni enters the room intent on killing Morano for breaching their agreement, his purpose to protect his interest in Emily's property. The encounter is a metaphoric sexual violation accompanied by swordplay and blood. However, it is the would-be groom's blood that is spilled; in the female Gothic fantasy, the groom is the deflowered virgin, and his violation is an aggressive and violent act that feminizes him, making him "safe" for the heroine.

In this scene from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the groom's wound leaves the rule of the patriarch inviolate within the boundaries of his castle—the interloper is defeated and the heiress' gender capital is maintained. Elsewhere in the text, the wounding of the hero, Valancourt, by the heroine's excellent father, St. Aubert, complicates the matter of feminizing the hero. The "deflowering" of the groom by the bride's father has the heroine saved by her father, but the involvement of the father in the metaphoric castration of the groom has sexual undertones that hint at an incestuous compulsion. This sexual undertone in the Gothic novel accounts for the "sense of something off-limits and inchoate" that "runs through all the most interesting Gothic fictions of the period" (Miall 346). Radcliffe requires each of her heroes to be wounded before he can be alone with the heroine. Valancourt is especially safe for the heroine, as he is wounded a second time, for good measure, by Jean the gardener.

The rudimentary 'something' of the ritualistic wounding of the hero became a requirement of the Gothic corpus that existed beyond Radcliffe's writing. It is taken to extremes in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* with Rochester's mutilation. Hoeveler explains Brontë's "heavy-handed treatment of the scene" as demonstrating "what happens to a cultural code that has persisted without necessarily being understood by its late practitioners" (66). The physical trauma suffered by the hero becomes a correlative of the emotional trauma suffered by the heroine, fantasized by the author and the reader as a new masculine ideal, one that is constructed by feminine, rather than patriarchal, ideology. As Hoeveler states, a man who has thus been gendered as "masculine" in the bourgeois sense "will not think he can tyrannize over his wife and children; this man will not attempt anything as foolish as adultery or its attendant sins; he will not chain his wife to rocks in a cave" (32).

The violent feminization of the hero allows the heroine to safely establish her own domestic sphere. She appears to be acting properly domestic as she does her housekeeping but she is in fact appropriating the role in a new feminine way, thereby rejecting patriarchal constructions of the domestic woman and becoming instead what patriarchy would define as an "antidomestic woman." At the conclusion of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily is ready to step into the domestic role. She has completed the journey from patriarchal domesticity to a new female-centred domestic sphere. She sells the Tholouse property to restore her financial situation, and purchases Epourville, her father's home, from Quesnel, establishing Annette and Ludovico to tend it. Emily is a newly-defined domestic woman, taking charge as she restores La Vallée to "domestic blessedness" and reveals her restored faith in her lover when she "begged Valancourt would allow her to resign to Mons. Bonnac" the legacy bequeathed to her by Signora Laurentini (672). As she becomes a wife Emily is able to manage her affairs more fully, with more autonomy, than an eighteenth-century heiress who would be more likely to resign her fortune to her groom than to ask him to allow her to do a favour on his behalf. Radcliffe both exposes and undermines the paradoxes of the domestic woman in her heroine. While Emily appears complicit in maintaining the construction of the domestic woman by settling complacently into the domestic role, she has reinscribed that role by renovating the male-dominated domestic space.

A less successful challenge to patriarchal restraint occurs in *Secresy* with Sibella's resistance to Valmont, her guardian, who is a formidable opponent. Sibella is not a typical Gothic heroine, but she shares the heroine's characteristics. She is beautiful, intelligent and innocent. And she is restrained within the villain's domain—Valmont's "island," where she is terrorized by him, not in the traditional sense of the Gothic villain pursuing the heroine, but through his demands and edicts.

Sibella has been reared away from the world, her guardian intending her to become the perfect domestic woman, although it is difficult to imagine "the wild girl of the castle" as a domestic woman, tending to her embroidery or pouring tea (95). According to Caroline, Sibella has been ruined by "artifice and secresy," the "dangerous vicious tools" with which she has lived (242). Valmont gives her a Rousseauesque upbringing, designed to keep her innocent of the world, weak-minded, obedient and educated "specially to please man," as Rousseau asserts women should be (*Émile*). However, Valmont's motivation is patriarchal power, not domesticity, and his efforts to create the domestic woman are unsuccessful. In the character of Sibella, Fenwick, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, rejects the notion of the patriarchally-defined domestic woman, constructed by men who attempt "to keep [women] always in a state of childhood" (Wollstonecraft 20). Mary Hays asserts:

> That 'most women have no character at all' it is feared men in general endeavour to make themselves believe [quoting Pope]...Upon this principle...such as it is, men have formed a standard, to which they would willingly reduce the whole sex.... [M]en will not allow their companions to be, what Heaven has made them, and intended them to remain; but must model them anew after their own fashion; to suit their passions and prejudices; and so as to give the least check possible to that unbounded freedom to which they have always aspired, and the least chance possible for women to emancipate themselves.
> (31-2)

Her argument that men 'model' women 'after their own fashion to suit their passions and prejudices' instead of leaving them 'to be, what Heaven has made them, and intended them to remain' acknowledges and rejects the constructedness of the domestic woman.

The frequent references to "making" Sibella speak to Fenwick's awareness of the domestic role as a patriarchal construction. In each instance, the reference is to Valmont creating the ideal domestic woman. He is the metaphoric representation of the patriarchal structure. He sets out to construct Sibella as he deems women should be; he exerts political control over her by determining what she may and may not do; he controls her finances, and even withholds information of them from her, thereby keeping her completely dependent upon him; and he attempts to restrict her to the interior space of his domain, which, surrounded by a moat, is in effect an island and therefore suggestive of England. Fenwick's portrayal of autocratic male dominance is a political metaphor for the Empire with Sibella constructed to become the mother of the next generation of imperial subjects. In Fenwick's microcosm of English society, patriarchy attempts to wield complete authority over its own creation, the domestic woman.

Valmont's effort to create of Sibella the ideal domestic woman has tragic consequences. Sibella, a thinking, feeling, reasoning individual, resists Valmont. She has more than an inkling of a sense of herself as an individual:

> My mind bursts the bounds prescribed to my person, and impels itself forward to share the advantages of society. Compelled to return to its prison, it is disgusted with its own conceptions, and sinks into languor and dissatisfaction...
>
> Why, if he meant me to degenerate into the mere brute, did he not chain me in a cave, shut out the light of the glorious sun, forbid me to converse with intelligent nature? Then I might have expressed my wants in a savage way...and, lying down to enjoy the sleep of apathy, have thought, if I could have thought at all, that this was to be happy. A being superior to this only in a little craft, did Mr. Valmont design to make me: a timid, docile slave, whose thoughts, will, passions, wishes, should have no standard of their own, but rise, change or die as the will of a master should require. Such is the height of virtues I have heard Mr. Valmont describe as my zenith of perfection.
>
> (II, iv, 43-44)

Sibella, propelled toward attaining the 'zenith of perfection,' that is the characteristics of the ideal domestic woman, is locked up for her defiance. She, like Madame Cheron/Montoni and Emily who are locked up by Montoni because they will not sign their property over to him, is literally incarcerated because she will not yield.

The inference in these texts is that feminine domesticity *requires* that a woman be imprisoned by masculine authority. With her death, Sibella makes the final, irrevocable rebellious stand against Valmont's imprisoning patriarchy, asserting finally that he has "[n]o right to the exercise of an unjust power over" her (I, xii, 199). However, she ultimately gives Valmont the last word by gratifying his "my way or the highway" authoritarianism. It is, to say the least, a pyrrhic victory. In resistant characters like Sibella, and less overtly resistant characters like Emily, the male construction of the ideal domestic woman is rejected by female Gothics in favour of the antidomestic woman whom the Gothic heroine embodies.

The Antidomestic Woman

The realization of the antidomestic woman occurs as the heroine attempts to reinscribe her domestic space. I use the phrase "antidomestic" similarly to the term "antihero"; the antidomestic woman does not necessarily reject domesticity. Rather, she possesses the qualities of the domestic woman, as the antihero does the qualities of the hero, but her actions are not necessarily those of the ideal domestic woman. She avoids marriage and maternity throughout the text until she has ensured that the hero is a suitably safe husband. She must resolve the secret around which the plot turns and which is always, as Ellis states, "a manifestation of sexuality" (73). The biggest, and most oppressive, secret of domestic femininity is the secret of female sexuality, according to the female Gothic novel. The destructive power of feminine passion is a recurrent trope. Many female characters (Sibella, Laurentini, Matilda and Ellinor, Mrs. Marlowe's mother) are destroyed or in some way invoke tragedy by indulging their passions, and they provide valuable lessons to the heroine and the reader. The tragedy incurred by the women who indulge their passion is an affirmation of the passionate and uncontrolled nature of women, and therefore seems to conform to the patriarchal assertion that the domestic woman needs to be controlled. The heroine's resistance to her domestic role, however, contests the patriarchal assertion and contends that it is the secrecy surrounding female desire that is the destructive force.

The exploration of female sexuality undermines both the patriarch's assertion that it is patriarchal control, not self-will, that must govern women and the notion that innocence is to be maintained at all costs. Passion must, according to Romantic precepts, come under the control of reason. Keeping a woman in a state of innocence, as Wollstonecraft points out, withholds reason, for without experience reason cannot develop. In female Gothics, the heroine's innocence is often her biggest liability. Radcliffe, Lee and Fenwick explore their heroines' innocence and sexuality through the escape from patriarchal control.

Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, reaches sexual maturity after both parents' deaths. She has been carefully reared to ensure that her innocence will not be compromised by experience. Her father "endeavoured, with unremitting effort, to counteract those traits in her disposition, which might hereafter lead her from happiness" (5). She is given an academic education, comprised of "a general view of the sciences, and an exact acquaintance with every part of elegant literature," designed by St. Aubert to promote a "well-informed mind" which "is the best security against the contagion of folly and of vice," and she is allowed "every innocent means of happiness" (6). St. Aubert, who has "too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue," attempts also to "strengthen her mind" by teaching her to look, "with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way" (5). Despite Emily's intelligence and St. Aubert's attention to notions of a suitable education for girls that appear to be drawn from Wollstonecraft, Emily is overprotected. St. Aubert is correct in that a well-informed mind can provide some measure of experience, but it is knowledge of the world and of life in general that constitutes the kind of awareness that affords protection in the social world. Her father's concerted efforts to maintain Emily's innocence continue right up to the point of his death, when he warns her of the dangers of too much sensibility, telling her not to

> indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those, who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance. And, since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them. (79-80)

He extracts a promise from her to burn, unread, certain papers he has hidden away. Scrupulously following her father's instructions, she burns the papers, but not before finding a miniature of a woman she cannot identify that she had previously seen her father weeping over, and reading some disturbing phrases.

St. Aubert's injunction to Emily not to read the papers, coupled with the miniature, as Ellis states, "plants in Emily's mind the very intimation of evil from which he has sought to spare her: a suspicion that the relationship she had with her mother was a false one, and that it is his own infidelity that St. Aubert is trying to conceal" (115). Ironically, the information required to ease Emily's suspicions is contained in the papers which aroused them in the first place, specifically that the woman in the miniature is St. Aubert's sister, who was murdered by her husband because of his infidelity. Emily's dilemma is how to reconcile her suspicions and regain her faith in her parents without disobeying her father and without compromising her innocence by delving into areas inappropriate for a woman's interest. Radcliffe solves some of Emily's dilemma by having the information come to her by accident, but Emily still maintains a sense of guilt over discovering her father's secret, as Ellis notes (115). In obeying her father, Emily appears to be complicit in her fate, for by having read the papers before burning them she would have saved herself much anguish. However, given the social culture in which she has been raised, it is difficult to perceive how Emily could possibly have done otherwise.

When Emily is confined by her uncle to the castle of Udolpho, Radcliffe has her heroine fleeing down dark corridors away from the hot pursuit of a would-be rapist, and encloses her in the Gothic castle in a bedchamber that has a door that cannot be locked from the inside and has a tunnel-like staircase leading away from, and to, it. When Emily is in her room, she is fearful that someone will breach its entrance and is frustrated at her powerlessness to control access to it. Emily constantly seeks the comfort of her bedchamber, a room selected for her by Montoni, when she feels threatened, withdrawing to what should be her private retreat, but is an interior space with a hidden entrance that is perpetually vulnerable. Montoni's designation of the room for her, leaving her little choice about where she will spend her time, and the lock on the other side of the door, over which she has no control, mark Emily's sexual vulnerability in a patriarchal world. Emily's continual retreat to this room when threatened, rather than seeking another place of concealment, and her constant concern about that unlockable door, illustrate her innocence. In the mind of the reader, however, it may hint at Emily's complicity with the patriarchal power structure that attempts to control her chastity. The sexually aware reader may see in Emily's situation a suggestion of the dangers of desire through the metaphor of this door in an uncomfortable insinuation of feminine rape fantasy. The innocent reader, like the heroine, fears the unknown that threatens from outside the enclosed space.

Emily's attainment of experience throughout the novel suggests a departure from her innocent state that does not compromise her virtue. It may seem, and critics have argued it, that the Gothic heroine does not change because she remains, from beginning to end of the novel, the victimized female under patriarchal authority. In the case of Emily St. Aubert, a gradual process of maturing occurs throughout the course of the novel, as Ellis notes, as Emily develops her own sense of reason, unfettered by her father's over-protectiveness but guided by him to develop the ability to command her feelings. Emily, at the beginning of the novel, is attentive to her father's teachings. He warns her about possessing too much sensibility and the dangers of 'fine feeling,' and instructs her to learn to command her feelings or fall victim to them (80). Emily assures her father of how much she values his advice and makes a deathbed promise to him not to forget it or to "cease from endeavouring to profit by it" (80). The characteristics of the sentimental heroine, who swoons when confronted with danger, and the feminine inclination toward imagination and terror, are barriers to resolving the mysteries of her past. Emily must overcome "her tendency to respond with terror and supernatural explanations to unusual 'surrounding circumstances' which prove, upon rational examination, to be *heightened nature* [not the supernatural] guiding her wanderings in the direction of the truth she seeks" (Ellis 113, original emphasis). She must, in short, strive to diminish her feminine "otherness" by developing more masculine characteristics.

Radcliffe provides her heroine with ample opportunity to progress toward mastery of her excess of feeling in a series of encounters with the "supernatural," beginning when she visits her father's library after his death. As Emily sits contemplating St. Aubert's death, the door opens slowly and she hears "a rustling sound" and thinks she sees "something move. The subject she had been considering, and the present tone of her spirits, which made her imagination respond to every impression of her senses, gave her a sudden terror of something supernatural. She sat for a moment motionless, and then, her dissipated reason" returned (95). The "spectre" turns out to be her dog. Later in the text, Emily repeats her father's edicts to Madame Montoni, when the latter laments her marriage to the Signor: "...it is not natural to me to boast, and if it was, I am sure I would not boast of sensibility—a quality, perhaps, more to be feared, than desired" (281). Initially it is not entirely clear if Emily brings sensibility under the control of reason, or if she is merely parroting her father, but it becomes apparent in the course of the text, when she seeks logical explanations for the mysterious and chastises Annette for her superstitions, that, as Emily learns to evade feminine tendencies, she has embraced her father's precepts.

Emily has learned to see the world from her father's perspective. She lacks intellectual autonomy; her mind is, in effect, enclosed in the "psychic prison" her father has constructed for her out of his desire to protect her. Emily's innocence is matched, to St. Aubert's delight, by Valancourt, whose "simplicity of ... manners" rendered him "a characteristic figure in the [natural] scenes around them" (49). Valancourt and Emily together "appeared like two lovers who had never strayed beyond these their native mountains," whose hearts were "pure and affectionate" (49). St. Aubert shares his enmity toward the city with them: "How then are we to look for love in great cities, where selfishness, dissipation, and insincerity supply the place of tenderness, simplicity and truth?" (50). Valancourt has never been exposed to the corruptions of the city but, when Emily dutifully refuses to see him because of Cheron's objections to him, he escapes to the debauchery of life in Paris. Emily, true to her father's teaching, still refuses to see Valancourt after her escape from Udolpho, but she soon begins to question her thinking. As she recollects fondly on her time with Valancourt, she wonders "what have I gained by the fortitude I then practised?" (584). She thinks of Valancourt's virtues and asks herself if it is "possible, that a mind, so susceptible of whatever is grand and beautiful, could stoop to low pursuits, and be subdued by frivolous temptations?" (585). When Emily eventually learns the truth of Valancourt's behaviour in Paris, she realizes that, despite her father's words to the contrary, love *can* "exist in a heart that has lost the meek dignity of innocence" (49).

Emily's encounter with the abbess, when she learns the truth of her aunt's death and Laurentini's role in it, provides her with what has been missing from her father's over-protective teachings. Laurentini clouds the issue of the identity of Emily's mother by confusing Emily with the miniature of the Marchioness de Villeroi that resembles St. Aubert's miniature. The abbess, acting as a surrogate mother, reveals the whole truth to Emily, disclosing information that St. Aubert had told the nun not to reveal, thereby reordering Emily's world and lifting the veil of St. Aubert's protection. Emily recovers her mother when the abbess confirms her parentage; she also learns, from Laurentini's story, about the dangerous effects of unrestrained passion. Once Emily absorbs the knowledge forbidden her by her father's edict not to read his papers, she escapes his patriarchal protection, thus escaping his idealized domestic sphere. Although Emily appears complicit in that she seems to restore St. Aubert's version of patriarchal domesticity, it is actually her own newly-renovated domestic space that she inhabits, a space that needs to be changed to accommodate her, because it is not only the domestic itself that is the problem but patriarchal authority over it.

In *The Recess* Lee subverts Ellinor's and Matilda's innocence and sexual maturation and recasts history so that passion and naiveté provide the catalyst for historic events. The girls' troubles begin with their desire to know about their real parentage. Their desire for the forbidden knowledge of the world outside their underground home comes as they reach marriageable age, the advent of their sexuality, suggesting an association between female passion and the dangers of the world outside the walls of the domestic space. Matilda's love for Leicester motivates her to leave the safety of her underground home, taking Ellinor with her, endangering them both. Ellinor's love for Essex sends her in pursuit of her lover after she is tricked into marrying Arlington, but the whole escapade is too much for her and she goes mad. Matilda loses both her husband Leicester, who is murdered by the sisters' uncle, and her daughter Mary, who is poisoned, leaving Matilda to regret the impotence of innocence.

The sisters' departure from the Recess is a metaphoric "coming out." Their debut into society is a contortion of sexual maturity and rebirth, and the society they enter is not the less-bounded world they desire. Typically debuts involve masquerades and entertainment; Ellinor and Matilda participate in an elaborate masquerade in which their assumed identities are not play-acting but protection from courtly intrigue, and they literally provide the entertainment, hoping to go unnoticed as court musicians rather than debutantes. When the sisters leave their childhood home they are unprepared for the evils to which they will be exposed at court, and venture forth innocently, compelled by passion, to their doom.

Matilda's secret marriage to Leicester subverts both traditional marriage and the Gothic genre. While night-time visits by the groom to m'lady's bedchamber are common fare, Matilda is the one who must make the trip to Leicester's chambers, necessitated by the need to keep their union secret and by the practical consideration of her sharing a room with her sister. Matilda's only "wifely" function is sexual. She traverses secret passageways at night to reach Leicester, inverting the Gothic heroine's customary flight through dark corridors away from men's sexual advances. Matilda, sexually immature, innocent heroine, becomes the sexual aggressor in their relationship, thus acknowledging female sexual desire and simultaneously revealing its repression.

The acknowledgement of female sexuality is undertaken most interestingly in Fenwick's character, Sibella, whose innocence and sexual ignorance make for that peculiar charm of vulnerability dwelt on in the Gothic. Sibella's desire for Clement ends in her pregnancy and ultimately her death. Sibella, like Matilda and Ellinor, is innocent of the world and therefore vulnerable to it. Sibella's "marriage" to Clement is undertaken by her in all innocence and, though it reflects the true spirit of the matrimonial bond, leads to her demise in sordid circumstances. Her love for Clement is based on her idealization of him and her persistence in believing in him, not on mutual regard. She is too naïve to understand the implications of the situation when Clement allows her to give herself to him sexually without benefit of clergy.[11] Fenwick's implication is, like Lee's, that passion without the influence of reason can lead to tragedy.

Sibella's union with Clement and her subsequent pregnancy and Matilda's clandestine marriage and subsequent pregnancy precipitate a series of events with tragic consequences for both heroines. These secret marriages uphold passion over reason as the motivation for marrying, but it is the secrecy surrounding them, not the marriages themselves, that are dangerous. The innocent heroines embody the purity associated with the ideal domestic woman, but their purity makes them vulnerable to evil rather than protecting them from it. Social idealism that does not acknowledge sexuality creates a space for evil to exist. Sexual awareness is not the evil that precipitates a fall; it is the denial of sexuality that incites evil. The authors thus resist the denial of female sexuality through the reconstruction of the ideal domestic woman in favour of the antidomestic woman whose sexuality is acknowledged and who renovates the domestic sphere.

Female Gothics attempt to refashion the domestic sphere as a fantasy female-centred domestic space in which the heroine can establish herself, revealing the carceral nature of patriarchal domesticity and the dangers that exist within the domestic sphere. The reconstruction of female identity, and its rejection of the ideal domestic woman, insists that the patriarchal construction of woman is unsatisfactory. Although the Gothic heroine possesses the qualities of the ideal domestic woman—virtue, beauty and many "accomplishments"—she resists that idealization as the antidomestic woman. As the heroine attempts to renovate the domestic sphere, she must displace the rule of the patriarch and reinsert her mother, who has been idealized and abjected by the paternal order, to establish a female-centredness in the newly inscribed domestic space.

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[11] Benefit of clergy – *hist.* Exemption of the English tonsured clergy and nuns from the jurisdiction of the ordinary civil courts. Now also, ecclesiastical sanction or approval (*marriage without benefit of clergy*). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

Chapter 3

"Are You My Mother?":
The Loss and Recovery of the Maternal

> Nothing so true as what you once let fall,
> *Most women have no Characters at all.*
> (Alexander Pope, *Of the Characters of Women*, 1735)

> To secure the morality of after-ages, and render posterity superior to us in every thing great and praise-worthy, we should bend all our talents and attention to the formation, purity, and perfection of the female mind.
> (Rev. John Moir, *Female Tuition; or, An Address to Mothers, on the Education of Daughters*, 1784)

> In man, I would confidently assert, as biological fact, the males are the race; the females are merely the sex told off to recruit and reproduce it. All that is distinctly human is man—the field, the ship, the mine, the workshop; all that is truly woman is merely reproductive—the home, the nursery, the schoolroom.
> (Grant Allen, *Forum*, 1889)

Eighteenth-century women were bound as much by social expectations as by nature to bear children. Therefore, it is a very curious thing that the girls of so many eighteenth-century novels, by both male and female authors, do not reach adulthood in the presence of their mothers. The literary effacement of motherhood calls into question society's valuation of maternity and enacts what Hoeveler terms "the loss of the matriarchy, the destruction of the mother as a figure of power or even a fantasy of power in a society that no longer values her role or importance" (25). We may well view the quantity of ink expended in the idealization of the maternal in the late eighteenth century as an indication of the high degree to which motherhood was valued. However, I believe a reassessment of that position will reveal that the prevailing attitudes toward women and motherhood were ambivalent.

Ambivalence towards female roles is evident in the quotations that open this chapter and is represented in female Gothics by the absence of the maternal body, which must be recuperated by the heroine and reinstated in a fantasized female domestic space. Despite the attention given to promoting the "model female," which focused primarily on the time before marriage, the ideal mother existed mainly in ideology and imagination and was valued only inasmuch as she aided the state by producing the next generation of imperial subjects, and not as a corporeal being. Gothic novels by women assert the eighteenth century's ambivalence toward maternity by defamiliarizing the patriarchal social structure, representing social culture as a threat to the heroine who goes to great lengths to avoid marriage and, subsequently, maternity. Female Gothic authors achieve this defamiliarization through the typical Gothic setting and through the assertion of the Law of the Father over the role of the mother, associating the maternal with a sense of ambivalence that challenges the idealization of motherhood.

Ambivalence towards motherhood in female Gothics asserts the ideological difficulties intrinsic to reaching mature adulthood and becoming a sexual being, and consequently a mother, in a culture that, like Lord Chesterfield, regards women as "only children of a larger growth" (September 5, 1748). The Gothic heroine lingers in a state of perpetual adolescence, delaying marriage and motherhood for as long as she can. She has no need to grow up; the qualities of childhood are the virtues that will make her the ideal domestic woman. Yet, to fulfill her domestic role as mother, she must become sexually mature. The Gothic heroine who innocently seeks the safety of her bedchamber, the site of her sexual vulnerability, embodies the dichotomous nature of idealized womanhood exhibited in the eighteenth century's cultural ambivalence towards maternity. An exception to the Gothic heroine seeking subjectivity by recovering her mother is Fenwick's Sibella, who attempts to fulfil her subjectivity by acquiring knowledge and seeking an outlet for her abilities. She does not evade marriage and maternity, but resists the way patriarchy has constructed them. The heroine's attempts to re-order the domestic sphere resist both patriarchal authority and the ideologies of the model female. Her efforts also seek to incorporate the corporeal maternal figure within that newly defined domestic space, thereby, while not resolving social ambivalence towards motherhood, reconstructing the maternal role as one that can exist outside of paternalistic control. If Sibella had lived and fulfilled her desires, one would like to think that she would have attained a new level of emancipated motherhood. Sadly, that does not seem a possibility in her time.

While the importance of the mother is maintained in conduct literature and feminist tracts, the ideal mother identified in those writings is a patriarchal construction that meets the needs of the state in answer to the threat represented by the ideals fought over in the French Revolution. The decadence and licentiousness of the French upper classes and the fashionable circles that mimicked them contributed to the revolution in France. The social chaos of the French Revolution was felt in England, where reactionaries and reformers, from radicals to Evangelicals, saw "reverence for religion, marriage and domesticity as the guarantors of social cohesion" (Myers 328). Although the idealization of maternity proclaims the importance and status of motherhood, the reality of the life lived by mothers was very different. The material reality of women's existence included inadequate education for their maternal role, limited earning potential, few legal rights or protections and little respect in society. "Gothic authors caught this contradiction" between idealization and reality "and present a fissured ideology about the mother" (Hoeveler, personal communication). Even "mainstream" authors, such as Jane Austen, give mothers "bad press" (ie Mrs. Bennett and Lady Bertram). Such literary figures contrast sharply with the ideal mother depicted by Wollstonecraft, the mother who, if she has the "leisure and good sense … "could best educate [her daughters] herself" with the goal to ensuring that they are properly prepared "to fulfil the important duties of a wife and mother" (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with reflections on female conduct, in the more important duties of life.* [London: 1787], 57). The social idealization of the maternal role promotes ambivalence toward motherhood, because the ideal mother exists mainly in ideology; that is, the textual "mother" is an idealized construction that exists largely in imagination, most often in memory (a mental process aided by the imagination), after the daughter has been separated from her mother.

What is lost in the space between reality and idealization is the material body of the mother. In many female Gothic texts, particularly Radcliffe's and symbolically in Lee's where Elizabeth is a patriarchal figure, this breach is represented by the mother's absence or imprisonment by the patriarch. She has been cast out by the Law of the Father. At first reading it appears that the effacement of the maternal is a narrative strategy designed to leave the heroine vulnerable in these novels of sexual danger. Further assessment, however, suggests that the authorial strategy is not limited to making the heroine vulnerable but reveals the dangers to innocence when the protective presence of the maternal authority is replaced by the autocratic power of the paternal order. Once the heroine, like her middle-class readers, reaches marriageable age—that is, the age of her sexual awakening—she becomes a commodity that will enable the conveyance of property between two men. The mother's presence is not required for this commercial transaction and she is written out of the text. Thus, in female Gothics, the effacement of the maternal body is informed by the social ambivalence surrounding the role of mother, an ambivalence that is not resolved and which therefore questions the real value society places on mothers.

Ideology of Maternity

The decadence witnessed in France gave rise to a climate of moral seriousness in which women were seen as the source of moral regeneration. Moralists and pamphleteers, male and female, called for a revolution in feminine behaviour and upheld idealized domesticity as a way to sustain the country's moral principles. A new paradigm of feminine behaviour was postulated by educators such as Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Clara Reeve, Maria Edgeworth, Anna Letitia Barbauld, *et al*, who, like Reverend John Moir in the quotation above, identified the need for a reformation of female education. Moralists and educators attacked the inadequacies of fashionable education and sought to de-emphasize the ornamental and pleasing in favour of the moral and useful (Myers 331). They helped to create a new ideology of educated womanhood, a "cultural myth" of women whose moral power and influence would educate the young and the illiterate, tend the sick and amend the worldly habits of men and the debauchery of the lower classes (Saunders). They would restore order to the national house. In short, the ideology of maternity expanded the domestic sphere to include the nation.

However, while Wollstonecraft, More and their sister educators advocated the importance of the maternal in the future of the state, the ideal was not achieved at that historical juncture, if indeed it ever was. Reformist educators incorporated and disseminated the seminal bourgeois ethic that elevated useful industry and the family in a progressive ideology that criticized the status quo. Myers points out the crucial distinction that "female moral reformers were recasting" bourgeois ethics "in women's terms for women's benefit," molding "the general middle-class protest against aristocratic license and inutility" to suit "the feminine sphere of endeavor" (334). Myers further asserts that moral reform offered "activist ideologues a body of legitimating imperatives and a vocabulary for venting female dissatisfaction and rendering telling critiques of a society governed by worldly libertine males" (334).

Attitudes toward women expressed by various sources reveal the ambivalence toward women and motherhood that informs the female Gothic novel. Wollstonecraft advocates enlightened womanhood and More promotes doctrines of Evangelical femininity; both promote domesticity as social responsibility, constituted of active roles that give women a place in restructuring the world according to the values of the home. They both challenge standard conduct literature that recommends, as Dr. John Gregory does in *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), that women should conceal their good sense, wit, learning and good health because those qualities are intimidating to men (Gregory 14, 15, 23). Gregory advocates a reformation of female manners and education that proscribes a less active role, one that seems to modern readers very passive, and that undermines the ideal feminine behaviour proposed by More and Wollstonecraft.

Setting a more critical tone than Gregory, Reverend John Moir, in *Female Tuition; or, An Address to Mothers, on the Education of Daughters* (1784), also attacks the state of womanhood, which he cites as a self-perpetuating "standing sarcasm on common sense" (12). He notes that "whatever perverts the passions of their daughters, or intoxicates their fancies with giddiness and pride, dazzles their rising minds with the glare of fashion, or inflames their tender affections with fictitious desires, may be traced with certainty to the pernicious and ill-judged tenderness of mothers" (12-13). The solution, he asserts, is the proper education of women for "with women, the education of all the world begins, and in education all depends on a proper beginning" (35). Moir acknowledges that women have a greater innate sensibility, but they are not educated to apply it usefully:

> It is because proper use has not been made of this great master-spring in the female make [women's greater sensibility], to influence their judgments, that women are universally fond of whatever is flashy and glaring, much more affected by our dress and manners than we are by theirs, and perpetually the dupes of flattery and detraction; that the maxims of fashion, however temporary and preposterous, are adopted by most of them uniformly and implicitly; that their pursuits in general are trivial, visionary, and capricious. (95-6)

This ill-preparedness of women is taken up in female Gothics, especially Radcliffe's, in characters who are the slaves of fashion and decadence, for example Mrs. Ashburn in *Secresy*, Maria de Vellorno in *A Sicilian Romance*, and Madame Cheron/Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

The tendency of these characters towards excessive sensibility, possessing qualities that Coleridge notes as characteristic of eighteenth-century manners, implies that the characteristics encouraged as ideal in the domestic woman are actually less than desirable. Further, these qualities foment ambivalent, even derogatory, attitudes toward women, attitudes that are long-standing. Moir's reference in 1784 to women being 'perpetually the dupes of flattery' gives evidence of very little change of attitude from a generation before, when Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773) wrote in his "Letters to His Son" that

> Women have, in general, but one object, which is their beauty; upon which, scarce any flattery is too gross for them to swallow. Nature has hardly formed a woman ugly enough, to be insensible to flattery upon her person. ... An undoubted, uncontested, conscious beauty is, of all women, the least sensible of flattery upon that head; she knows it is her due, and is therefore obliged to nobody for giving it her. She must be flattered upon her understanding; which, though she may possibly not doubt of herself, yet she suspects that men may distrust." (Oct 16, 1747; 856-57).

Despite the purported importance of mothers to the nation, women are ever considered subject to patriarchal authority. Moir admonishes mothers to teach their daughters to be obedient. He notes that "we have no real enjoyment of freedom, without previously suffering restriction. To give society all the advantage of this principl[illegible] should first be applied, while our minds are yet in a state of infancy" (7). His maxim, however, applies more to the female than the male members of society: "Women, especially, should be accustomed to the earliest habits of subjection and obedience" (7). Women's position as subjects of patriarchal authority is revealed in female Gothics by villains who imprison their wives. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Montoni locks his wife, Emily's aunt and guardian, in the east turret to consider "the danger of offending a man, who has an unlimited power over" her (305). Madame Montoni chooses death over acquiescence to her husband's demands to sign her property over to him. Sibella, of *Secresy*, also dies to refuse Valmont's "exercise of an unjust power over" her (I, xii, 199). Gothic authors reject the absolute authority of the patriarch over women by scripting resistant characters.

The Ideal Mother in Female Gothic Fiction

The typical plot of female Gothics revolves around the heroine's search for her mother, a trope that allows intense psychological examination and discovery. Generally Gothic heroines, such as Emily St. Aubert and Julia Mazzini, are presented as endangered motherless young women, who remember their mothers as model females. The mother is removed from the narrative before the daughter reaches marriageable age, at about the time of the advent of her sexual awareness. In female Gothics, the absence of the mother reveals the paradoxes surrounding maternity and the domestic space, paradoxes that undermine the importance of the maternal role. One may wonder if the motherless state of so many female characters is partly a reflection of the fact that maternity in the eighteenth century was hazardous—many women died in childbirth—and life itself was somewhat tenuous so many children grew up without their mothers. Such a supposition would be too simple, however, as Gothic novels do not attempt to reproduce reality, but defamiliarize it by making the "family structure 'strange'" (Williams 71). It is this defamiliarization of the family and the maternal that is unique to the Gothic. The conventions of the Gothic novel facilitate the Romantic aim of examining the world with "strangeness of vision," with an eye not clouded by habit or custom. It is, as Williams notes, one thing to avoid seeing the world through the dullness of habit, and an entirely different matter to make strange the ways we make sense of the world, of "the entire patriarchal Symbolic order" (72). The defamiliarization of the patriarchal social structure in the Gothic novel undermines the authority of that structure by making it seem odd and peculiar, and by presenting it as a threat to the heroine and the innocence that patriarchy purports to protect.

The Lost Mother

Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, very nearly reaches the age of majority in the loving care of her mother, but Madame St. Aubert dies just as Emily comes of age. A glance at her father's papers raises doubts about her maternity, and Emily's subsequent recovery of the truth about her mother is assisted by surrogate mother figures. Likewise, Matilda and Ellinor (Lee's *The Recess*), Ellena (Radcliffe's *The Italian*), Emilia and Julia (Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*), Elvira (Mary Robinson's *Vancenza, or the Dangers of Credulity*), Althea (Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont*) and a plethora of other heroines grow up without their mothers and are raised by surrogates, whom they sometimes (mis)recognize as their natural mothers. The realization that the supposed mother is a surrogate, or the loss of the surrogate, precipitates the desire for the natural mother, suggesting a biological imperative in having the "real" mother, although "real" maternity can never be fully identified when it seems to be an ideological construction. The motherless child must always long for the maternal figure and seek her recovery.

Although social attitudes during the eighteenth century shifted toward a vision of affective family relations, "the transformation in the meaning of motherhood was slow and uneven" (J.S. Lewis 59). As domesticity changed middle- and upper-class family life, children became, not just economic objects for ensuring the continuance of the patriarchal family line and property, but emotional resources, the products of their parents' affection. In the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century "the primary function of motherhood shifted from an emphasis on the biological function of childbearing to an emphasis on the nurturant function of childrearing" (J.S. Lewis 58).

The view of maternity in female Gothic novels is somewhat privileged, with the disposable mother a recurring motif. Horace Walpole in *Castle of Otranto* creates a male-fantasy maternal figure who is the epitome of passivity and wifely submission. Hippolita is willing to accede to her husband's plan to divorce her and marry Isabella, which Manfred wishes to do to father a new heir since his son, Conrad, has been crushed by a giant casque. It is a case of "out with the old and in with the new" as Manfred has no more use for the wife whose reproductive ability has waned. Similarly, in the female Gothic the heroine's mother—the post-reproductive woman—and the fertile young woman cannot co-exist. Walpole's solution is simply to have the offending woman quietly go away, while women writers of the Gothic select a means of disposal that maintains their premise of the imprisoning patriarch who views woman as the reproductive function. Once the maternal resource has been depleted, the mother is excluded from the text: she is either dead (*Udolpho*) or imprisoned (*The Recess, The Italian*, *A Sicilian Romance*), thus opening up a realm of psychological exploration involving the heroine and her journey to self-discovery. In each instance, the domestic space is defamiliarized by the absence of the mother.

The mothers of heroines in Radcliffe's novels are typically absent, though not dead (except in *Udolpho*), but recoverable. The mother in *A Sicilian Romance* is presumed dead but actually has been imprisoned in the castle's dungeon by her husband and is later found by her daughter Julia. Having borne her children, the mother's usefulness has ended, so her husband, Ferdinand, Marquis of Mazzini, seals her away and replaces her with a younger, sexier woman, Maria de Vellorno, whose character is "very opposite to that of her predecessor. She [is] a woman of infinite art, devoted to pleasure, and of an unconquerable spirit" (6). Mazzini embodies ambivalence toward motherhood; his first wife was a model female, but he prefers the charms of the free-spirited and licentious de Vellorno, who is the antithesis of the maternal. Julia and her sister Emilia are raised by Madame de Menon, an old friend of their mother's.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily's ideal mother lives in domestic harmony with St. Aubert, the ideal father. Once her domestic purpose has been fulfilled, when Emily is of marriageable age, the mother's role within the text disappears and she is written out. St. Aubert fulfills his role as excellent father without the added pressure of filling the husband's role. Maternal identity is called into question when Emily sees her father's papers after his death. Emily experiences a measure of surrogate mothering from Madame Cheron, the mad-woman Laurentini and the abbess at the convent while she attempts to understand the mystery of the miniature her father kept. Madame Cheron is the matriarch of the St. Aubert family line, but her matriarchal authority is superseded by the law of the patriarch when she marries Montoni. As Emily (figuratively) recovers her mother by resolving the mystery of the miniature, she also establishes her own domestic space, freed from the imprisoning patriarch.

Mrs. Marlow, surrogate mother to Matilda and Ellinor, runs the underground household of Mary, Queen of Scots, in *The Recess*. Marlow's imprisonment is self-imposed; her near-marriage to her own brother has caused her to seclude herself from social life and the possibility of loving another man or of establishing a "normal" household with mother, father and children. Raising Matilda and Ellinor in the Recess and allowing them to believe during their childhood that she is their mother relieves Marlow of the role of socio-political domestic woman and mother. She has the authority of the matriarch without submitting to the patriarchal control of an individual man, a state she is unlikely to achieve in society unless she is a wealthy widow with no male relatives. Mrs. Marlow, who is not really a "Mrs.," is assisted in her surrogate parental role by Father Anthony. As a priest, he cannot actually be a father (or at least, cannot acknowledge being a father). The "father" in the Recess is sterile, thereby confounding the role of father. He is addressed as "Father," not father, and while he is the girls' educator and protector within the hidden cavern, his paternal role remains, figuratively and literally, underground. Furthermore, the paternal role in Lee's text is somewhat nebulous. The girls' biological father does not exist within *The Recess*; the patriarch is a shifting entity, sometimes Father Anthony, sometimes Leicester or Essex, and sometimes Elizabeth.

The figure of Elizabeth as the female patriarch hints at female complicity in the domestic imprisonment of women. Elizabeth's incarceration of Mary is, in the historical sense, a political manoeuvre, but its partial motivation by female jealousy blurs the line between masculine political reasoning and female emotion. In Lee's text, it is also the patriarchal abjection of the maternal figure. Mary's appearance in the text is intermittent as she is recovered by her daughters through their repeated remembrances of her. She is viewed in terms of others' relations to her, making "transient subjectivity the ironic condition of the queen's reproduction" (J.E. Lewis 143). Mary is a real/unreal figure; she is all at once a historical and a fictional character as well as a biological and an ideological mother. The underground household of the Recess is defamiliarized; it is a subversion, literally and figuratively, of a traditional home and of the society in which motherhood is disavowed by political power and intrigue.

The maternal role in Fenwick's *Secresy* is an interesting study in contemporary ideology. The only mother of the novel is Mrs. Ashburn, mother of Caroline. Mrs. Ashburn is an undomestic woman, representing the hypocrisy, luxury, over-indulgence and decadence of aristocratic society. She exemplifies Wollstonecraft's assertions that virtue can only be developed by the exercise of reason, which must occur independently of association with men. She is the aristocratic figure against which the idealization of the home and the domestic woman springs forth. Mrs. Ashburn is an ineffective mother whose daughter Caroline, the successful heroine of the novel, has discovered for herself her own moral position, free of the oppressive authority of a father figure and without being influenced by her mother, whose education has, as Wollstonecraft would say, "rendered her vain and helpless." Fenwick's characterizations of Mrs. Ashburn and Mr. Valmont imply the need for a reformation of parental roles, and hence of society in general. In Fenwick's depiction of parental authority, the need for virtuous and effective mothers, and fathers, is obvious.

Woman as Maternal Function

At the end of the eighteenth century childbearing was becoming less a natural function and more a medical practice, with male authority displacing the community of women that traditionally took care of labouring women (Banks 34). The all-male medical profession considered women inadequate to handle childbearing on their own and took over the management of childbirth, modeling uncomplicated deliveries on difficult births, thus, though reducing the mortality rate from complicated deliveries, colonising successful births as well. The most innately woman-centred part of women's lives, wherein women could experience a sense of empowerment, was corrupted. The devaluation of the maternal and the displacement of women in childbirth by male authority indicate a general social attitude of misogyny which results in the reduction of woman to the maternal function; she is merely a vessel for the patriarch's getting of an heir. She has no further use once she has fulfilled that function, rendering her, textually at least, disposable.

The idealization of the domestic woman, whose idleness signified her husband's success, "had a stunning effect on the philosophy and practice of birth" (Banks 55).[12] Similarly, J.S. Lewis asserts that "[u]nder the traditional patriarchal regime, the responsibilities of women toward their children—like their rights—scarcely existed beyond the cutting of the umbilical cord" (62).[13] It is paradoxical that, while women were reduced to the function of childbearing, they were not considered adequate, physically or emotionally, to bear children without the direction of a man.

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[12] Banks studies the declining practice of midwifery and the rise of medical intervention in childbirth through the history of the birth chair, which was, over time, altered to provide comfort and convenience to the birth attendant—the male physician—rather than the mother. Eventually the birth chair became the model for the "sick chair" as birthing became associated with illness and the birth chair was replaced by the delivery table.

[13] In fact, as Banks notes, the 'cult of true womanhood' became associated in the nineteenth century with the notion promoted by doctors that the use of the female brain detracted "from the normal development of those important organs of women, the uterus and ovaries" and "significantly contributed to women's general poor health and the gradual appearance of mental problems" (55). Attitudes toward motherhood began to change in the eighteenth century, but it was still mainly "an ascribed function," mostly associated with childbirth. Moving into the nineteenth century it "was becoming an achieved status." The new maternal role began to be seen as requiring the "emotional, intellectual and moral talents that [women] were traditionally thought to lack" (Lewis 62).

Male intervention in the process of childbirth has dire consequences in a later female Gothic, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Haunted by the death of his mother in childbirth, Victor Frankenstein sets out to improve the process of birthing. His transformation to "mother" is ill-conceived, accomplished through man-made science, not nature. Frankenstein sees himself as God-like when he becomes "capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter, " encouraged by "the improvement which every day takes place in science and mechanics" (81, 82). He believes that a "new species would bless [him] as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to [him]. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as [he] should deserve their's" [sic] (82).

Shelley suggestively describes Frankenstein's efforts to bring forth life in terms associated with pregnancy and childbirth: "much time spent in painful labour," "emaciated with confinement," "oppressed by a slow fever," "nervous to a most painful degree," "the instruments of life," etc. (81-85). She portrays him as a maternal, not a paternal, figure, aligning him with Eve, not God. Like Eve, Frankenstein must suffer for his guilty knowledge with painful maternity (Gilbert and Gubar 232). His "child," brought forth after "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue," is monstrous (81). Shelley's assertion that the interference of male authority in the maternal process results only in "destruction and infallible misery" addresses the shift in attitude toward childbearing and midwifery that continued into the nineteenth century and beyond (81).[14]

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[14] The effects of these changed attitudes toward childbirth are still felt as we enter the twenty-first century. Midwifery was virtually destroyed as a respected practice by the increasing pre-eminence of the physician in the late eighteenth century, which changed attitudes toward the philosophy of childbirth by redefining pregnancy and birth as pathology requiring medical intervention. The notion of pregnancy as a medical "condition," rather than a natural state, was not challenged until the mid-twentieth century when women

While Shelley, in *Frankenstein*, spoke out clearly about the decline of motherhood, Radcliffe, Lee, Fenwick and their sister authors were less overt in their indictment of their society's attitude toward maternity. In many female Gothic novels, the absence of the mother delineates the reduction of woman to the maternal function. Motherhood, and indeed womanhood, is portrayed as one long period of confinement, an extended "lying-in" that lasts the woman's whole adult life. As her daughter reaches sexual maturity and the laws of the paternal order take precedence, the requirement for the mother is abolished, metaphorically enacting the gender politics of late eighteenth-century social culture. The paternalistic creation of the ideal domestic woman appropriates woman's power to bring forth the next generation. The maternal body is thus abjected, in Anne Williams' terms, as the "rejection of the gross materiality of the (m)other" (35).

The abjection, or casting off, of the mother is a necessity, according to Julia Kristeva, for the creation of subjects within the patriarchal social culture because it facilitates independence from the maternal body (Oliver 4). Kristeva describes abjection as a function of the psyche through which the identities of subjects and groups are formed, and which excludes elements external to oneself or one's social group. The biggest threat to fledgling subjectivity is "dependence upon the maternal body" (Oliver 3). The heroine of the Gothic text, whose subjectivity is controlled by the patriarchal figure, is independent of the maternal body, it having been rejected by the patriarch, but

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began to question interventionist medical practices in the field of obstetrics. The medical community has been slow to relinquish its patriarchal hold over birthing women, although it has adopted some of the practices of midwifery. Childbirth largely continues to be a medically-managed practice rather than a natural process.

seeking recovery of the maternal within the patriarchal Gothic structure because of the orphaned daughter's desire for her mother.

Kristeva's system of signification operates not only within text but also in the familial order of the late eighteenth century. Maternal law regulates infancy and childhood, especially that of girls. As a girl attains sexual maturity, the maternal law is superseded by the paternal, by the Law of the Father. The feminine role within the family is thus no longer the purview of the mother but becomes the duty of the daughter, whose task is to continue the family line of whichever patriarchal grouping subsumes her. The patriarchally-constructed and dominated domestic sphere is an unsatisfactory space for women and the heroine's efforts to recover her mother attempt to re-establish the domestic space as a female-centred one, where motherhood is a valued feminine role.

The heroine's attempt to avoid marriage, and thus motherhood, reveals the contradictions imposed on maternity by the era's social culture. Cultural ideology demanded that "wives and mothers be both sexually chaste and pure 'virgins' in relation to their children and yet paradoxically emotionally responsive and sexually voracious 'whores' in relation to their husbands" (Hoeveler 69). Mothers reify their sexuality by producing children, yet, in their unchaste state, they are to be viewed as sacred progenitors of the next generation. By relinquishing their sexuality in marriage, into which they may have been forced, wives are "defiled and vilified by their husbands and culture" by producing children even as their children view them as "sacred and holy vessels" (Hoeveler 70).

Sexuality, male and female, and its abjection figure largely in Radcliffe's Gothic fiction, not only in her vision of the maternal but in her portrayal of "good" and "bad."

Radcliffe does not coalesce sexuality and virtue in one character, either male or female. St. Aubert, the "good" father, cannot reveal a sexual nature; only "bad" men have sexual sides. Thus, St. Aubert cannot be an adulterer, and must be rescued through Emily's search for the answer to the mystery of the woman in the portrait. Evil male characters like Montoni, the long-gone de Villeroi, and Mazzini reveal the destructive power of unrepressed sexual passion. Likewise women do not incorporate the qualities of virgin and whore. Radcliffe's female figures embody one or the other and the good and bad characters are presented in opposition (Hoeveler 69). Louisa, the good mother of *A Sicilian Romance*, is supplanted by Maria, the licentious second wife. Madame St. Aubert's identity is threatened by the mysterious woman in the portrait, who, in a plot twist, turns out to be another virtuous woman who has been opposed by the passionate Laurentini.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Emily's association with Madame Cheron, Laurentini and the abbess helps her to resolve her resistance to the domestic, in other words to marriage and maternity, an issue which is bound to sexuality. When death and the uncertainty of her mother's identity break the mother-daughter bond, Emily is faced with her father's sexuality, through the implication of his adultery, and with female sexuality in the form of the mysterious woman in the portrait who may be her mother and the women she meets who have been undone by their unrepressed passion. Both of the surrogate mother figures, Madame Cheron/Montoni and Signora Laurentini, victims of their own passions, have been involved with Montoni and "figure in a quasi-incestuous triangulation of mommy, daddy, and me in Emily's rather vague consciousness" (Hoeveler 93). The question of her mother's identity is resolved for Emily by the abbess of the convent, the non-sexual surrogate mother. Emily learns that sexual passion that is not brought under the control of reason results in madness and death; chastity is associated with enclosure within a community of women. The implication is that repression of sexuality is necessary to achieve the happy state of ideal domestic woman in the model family. Emily's recovery of her mother leaves her parents' relationship inviolate, her mother unbetrayed and allows her to assume her culturally-determined domestic role.

The figuring of desirable and undesirable traits in oppositional characters arises from women's anxiety about their maternal role, its importance and the threats to it from the sexual 'other woman' in a culture that removed middle-class women from waged labor and confined them to their homes, dependent upon their husbands (Hoeveler 69). This paradox of being—holy mother versus voracious whore—is taken up in female Gothic novels; the heroine cannot actualize the role of virtuous girl and married woman and spends most of the text avoiding marriage, seeking relief in the presence of the convent. Eventually the heroine is able to marry because her husband has been re-made into a safe alternative to her father (or patriarchal substitute). She will never meet her mother's fate.

Recovering the Mother

"Motherhood" is a term that has been contested by feminist criticism and theory (Childers 195). In the 1970s it was considered as a means of women's oppression, then recovered as a potential source of empowerment for women.[15] Social scientists[16] in the late 1970s emphasized the preoedipal[17] phase of infant development when the mother, not the father, is primary. For daughters, the mother-daughter relationship is key to the development of sexuality. In Western culture and Freudian theory, while masculinity is defined as the successful separation from the mother, daughters remain attached to the mother into adulthood and view themselves in relational terms. The absence of the successful mother in female Gothics is significant in that it portrays the usurpation of the maternal by the paternal, thus reducing motherhood to the function of maternity, which imprisons women within a role that is biologically determined and socially constructed.[18]

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[15] See Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. NY: Norton, 1976.

Freudian theory suggests that the oedipal nature of the child's entry into the Symbolic — *le Nom-du-Père*, or the Law of the Father[19]—displaces the maternal. Abjection of the maternal body facilitates the supremacy of the paternal order, the Law of

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[16] For example, Nancy Chodorow. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.

[17] The preoedipal phase, in psychoanalytic theory, occurs between the ages of three and five and precedes the Oedipus complex. It is dominated in both sexes by the mother-child relationship. Although Freud named this phase, he neglected it until the latter part of his career when he emphasized the importance of the preoedipal phase in the development of female sexuality. While later theorists have examined the preoedipal period from many perspectives, many have disputed Freud's insistence on the dominance of the Oedipus complex in structuring human relations. (*Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*)

[18] Julia Kristeva defines the maternal as a function that is important to culture and the development of subjectivity (*Desire in Language*). A woman, because she loves and desires, is a social and speaking being, but as a woman and a mother she is always sexed. However, her physical ability to bear children reduces her to reproduction, to the maternal function, in which the woman is not sexed. Kristeva analogizes the maternal body as a model for subjective relations; we are each, like the maternal body, a "subject-in-process," and as such consistently try to negotiate the other within.

[19] When the child reaches the Symbolic Order, she becomes subject to the *Nom-du-Père* which corresponds to the organizing structure of cultural society that is symbolized in Gothic texts as medieval abbeys or ancestral mansions. The Gothic castle, tangible representation of the Symbolic, *le Nom-du-Père*, is "founded on the distinction between male and female, on the repression of the mother specifically and 'the female' in general — in associating the always deferred 'signified' with the forbidden body of the mother" (Williams 46). *Nom-du-Père* translates literally as "Name of the Father," but the inference is greater. The 'Name' stands in for the larger social construction of the father, whose name the family bears, as the head of the household.

the Father. Motherhood is accorded "symbolic status" rather than "a real existence" (Kristeva 249). In Freudian terms, the effacement by the father of the mother's position as the centre of the child's ego formation acknowledges the mother's "death," the separation of the child from the mother. The corporeal mother is cast off by patriarchal law, replaced in female Gothics by a surrogate, one who is "mother-but-not-mother," a symbolic mother figure under the authority of the patriarch, whose authority over the child is easily supplanted. By recovering her abjected real mother and re-inserting her into the domestic sphere, the heroine resists the patriarchal order and revises the domestic space.

Psychoanalytic critics of the Gothic maintain the Oedipus complex as the determining factor for the exclusion of the maternal body. In female Gothics, as in other genres, the maternal body is not only imprisoned by the patriarch but abjected, cast off and associated with loss, death and horror, an association that Anne Williams notes when she states that "horror is a function of the earliest stirring of the pre-self's separation from the mother" (74). The primacy of paternal law effaces the role of mother in favour of the patriarch. By excluding the maternal body, female Gothics enact contemporary gender politics in which the Law of the Father predominates and the role of mother, although apparently revered for its importance, is reduced to the maternal function. The heroine's search for her abjected mother is an attempt not only to recover her mother, but to claim her own subjectivity and establish a new female-centred domesticity. One discovers that absence is often as important as presence, and what is *not* written is as telling as what *is* written. Just as sexuality and domestic violence are investigated as 'what in the polite world of middle-class culture cannot be spoken' (Ellis), maternity exists covertly in female Gothic novels, despite its apparent exclusion.

The mother's recovery echoes Freud's description of the *fort-da* game, which he relates in accounting for "repetition compulsion."[20] Miles and Hoeveler point to the "primal wound" inflicted in the heroine by the mother's absence, played out repetitiously by the female Gothic author who "keeps disposing of the mother, only to reel her body magically back into the text for obsessive view over and over again" (Miles 106, Hoeveler 25). The 'primal wound' is located in the loss of the matriarchy, recreated in the Symbolic order as the attempt to reestablish infantile connections with the lost mother. The *fort-da* game announces the child's departure from the Imaginary state of plenitude and entry into the Symbolic order with its always deferred pleasure.

The Gothic heroine occupies a liminal space at the threshold of the Symbolic, where she realizes that the *Nom du Père* will order her life. Miles notes the analogy between the "figure of the heroine on a threshold and Lacan's mirror stage" (107). In both cases, moving forward means entering a state of desire, of presence forever deferred. The heroine looks, over and over, at the image of her mother, as Julia does literally in *A Sicilian Romance* and Emily does in her mind in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, looking backward at the state of childish plenitude (Lacan's Imaginary) and forward to a state of desire for the deferred presence of the prohibited suitor (the Symbolic). Both the loss of the maternal body and the deferred presence of the suitor are linked to the paternal law, to the imprisonment of the mother and the banishment of the lover. Looking back toward maternal sensibility provides an illusory image of subjectivity because the heroine existed, and is still trapped, within the patriarchal structure, yet when she looks forward toward the patriarchal order that will structure her adult life she sees repression and deferral. The heroine's flight from imprisonment within the patriarchal Gothic structure and her circular journey back to the domestic marks her transition into the Symbolic order that shapes her social culture.

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[20] Termed by Freud "traumatic neurosis" (Freud 8)

The analogy between the Gothic heroine and Lacan's mirror stage is suggested by the presence in the text of the maternal portrait, which provides the heroine with a link to her ancestry. The connection to a feminine familial line brings to bear a knowledge of her ancestry and forms the heroine's fragmented image of her self in a manner curiously similar to Lacan's mirror stage. As the heroine unravels the mystery of the portrait and her association with it, fitting together the pieces of her ancestral past, she is assembled by her familial lineage and constructed according to her social culture. What the heroine realizes is the construction of her gender by her social culture; it is her interpellation[21] into the collective social process that defines her as a subject with a socially defined role. While the plots of female Gothics do not revolve around portraits, their existence within the Gothic edifice propels the plot, for it is when she stands before these portraits that the heroine draws together the fragments of her matrilineal ancestry in resistance to the patriarchal governing structure.

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[21] In Louis Althusser's theory of Ideology, interpellation refers to the central operation by which ideology assigns an identity to the individual as a subject. The process of interpellation is a moment of recognition that Althusser likens to a hailing by the forces of authority. He cites the example of a police officer calling "Hey you!" in a crowd. The individual's involuntary response to being hailed acknowledges his or her identity as a subject. Althusser suggests that we have always existed in ideology; he cites the ritual of anticipation surrounding the birth of a child. His understanding of self-recognition is influenced by Lacan's theory of the mirror stage of development.

When Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* sees the portrait of the woman her father weeps over—a woman who is not her mother but who resembles Emily—she misrecognizes the portrait, casting doubt upon her parents' relationship and her mother's identity. The answers to her mystery come to her through surrogate mother relationships with women whose histories are related to her, Madame Cheron, the mad-woman Laurentini and the abbess at the convent. Through her communion with this community of mother figures, Emily learns about herself. She becomes aware of her own subjectivity, of her otherness in the male-dominated hegemony of her culture, and of her own innocence and the helplessness it engenders within her. She learns how to evade the patriarch but her knowledge of her otherness invades her consciousness. The paradox of knowing results in her discovery of her dead aunt and recovery of her mother's identity.

The question of maternal identity is also an important element in Lee's *The Recess.* Matilda and Elinor stand before the portraits of their parents and, unknowing, do not recognize them. Believing that Mrs. Marlow is their mother, they mis-identify with someone whose past is not their past, whose familial links are not theirs. When they learn of their mother's identity, revealed to them by Marlow on her deathbed, they transfer their love for her to their "real" mother. When they see their mother in person, she is framed by a window as they overlook the garden where she walks. Their mother always appears to them as a portrait, an image that represents the 'symbolic status' of motherhood, rather than its 'real existence.'

Emily's need to know the truth about her mother and Matilda's and Ellinor's love for their natural mother impart the sense of a biological imperative that suggests the power of the mother. Matilda's and Ellinor's vision of their mother, encapsulated as a portrait surrounded by borders, suggests the limitations imposed on maternal power by the patriarchal socio-political order. Maternal power is that very thing that male authority attempts to expropriate by confining women and imposing itself on the processes of childbearing. The maternal body, in its power to bring forth the next generation of imperial subjects, is reanimated by female Gothic texts that attempt a defiant overthrow of the patriarchy. Hoeveler asserts that the Gothic heroine "excavates the buried body of her real or metaphorical mother, and by doing so she reinstates a fictionalized feminine fantasy: the matriarchy" (23). By redeeming her mother the Gothic heroine establishes her position in a "long-lost female-coded tradition" (Hoeveler 23).

While Gothic heroines resist the patriarch and his rule, they do not always enjoy a happily-ever-after ending. Radcliffe's novels re-envision the socio-political world of the eighteenth century in a female fantasy: the heroine escapes the patriarch, finds her mother, re-inherits her wealth and title and marries the hero, who has been feminized through his wounds and thereby is no longer a threatening patriarchal figure. Other women authors of the Gothic are not so optimistic as Radcliffe. Lee portrays the heroines' struggles to assert themselves as subjects amidst the swirl of political intrigue. Matilda ultimately ends up back in the domestic space to which women are relegated, without having achieved the happily-ever-after ending of the Radcliffian heroine. She is alone, without husband, child or sister. Ellinor suffers the fate of the hysterical woman—madness followed by death. Fenwick's portrayal of the heroine's attempts to achieve subjectivity is even more dystopic. Sibella dies in childbirth, motherless, without a husband, cast out by Valmont's censure of her, because she does not conform to the patriarchal authority that imprisons her.

The depiction in Gothic texts of patriarchy and domesticity presents the paradoxes that surrounded eighteenth-century women. The novel, and the Gothic novel in particular, was, as Kate Ellis states, "both a product of the construction of separate spheres for men and women and, insofar as it gave women examples to follow, a medium through which that construction of gender relations could be elaborated" (x). However, it also subverts the ideology of separate spheres, allowing women writers to resist the domestic sphere even as they found an empowering form of expression within its confines. The result is a coded discourse that exerts a measure of political authority even as it elaborates the social structure of eighteenth century gender relations from a feminine viewpoint.

Chapter 4

Shameless Scribbling:[22]
Female Gothic as Palimpsest

> Romantic scenes, and surprizing events, are exhibited in elegant and animated language.
>
> (Review of *Sicilian Romance, Monthly Review,* New Series 3 [September, 1790]: 91.)

"Safely" ensconced within the confines of the domestic sphere, women writers of the late eighteenth century adopted strategies that allowed them to write critically of their society, employing the conventions that repressed them to counter the patriarchal social system. They wrote from a distinctly female perspective about issues of concern to women, creating hidden meanings. The palimpsests thus created subvert patriarchy and patriarchal literary standards. Gilbert's and Gubar's study of nineteenth-century women writers also applies to women writers of the late eighteenth century, who, like their Victorian sisters, "felt they had things to hide":

> Locked into structures created by and for men, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers did not so much rebel against the prevailing aesthetic as feel guilty about their inability to conform to it. With little sense of a viable female culture, such women were plainly much troubled by the fact that they needed to communicate truths which other (i.e. male) writers apparently never felt or expressed.
>
> (74-75)

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[22] "Shameless scribblers": Alexander Pope attacked Eliza Haywood in a passage from "The Dunciad" (book ii, 11. 157 ff), adding a note alluding to "the profligate licentiousness of those shameless scribblers (for the most part of that sex which ought least to be capable of such malice or impudence) who in libellous Memoirs and Novels reveal the faults and misfortunes of both sexes, to the ruin of public fame, or disturbance of private happiness."

Gilbert and Gubar assert that "what literary women have hidden or disguised is what each writer knows is in some sense her own story" (75-76). The woman writer's story is her attempt to define herself, but it is also a universally female story that belongs to the woman reader as well. To "free herself" from patriarchal restraint the woman writer "must shatter the mirror that has so long reflected what every woman was supposed to be" (Gilbert and Gubar 76).

The need eighteenth-century women writers felt to 'communicate truths which other writers never felt or expressed' speaks of a culture of repression that would not listen to a critical female voice. In the case of Gothic texts, that female voice describes the social repression of women and the effacement of motherhood as the metaphoric locking up of women in castles or dungeons. The female authorial voice in the eighteenth century could never be separated from its text, so women's writing, and criticism of it, was gender-driven. Duncan Wu notes that "reviewers of the day had distinct expectations and aesthetic standards when assessing the work of women" (3-4). He cites a reviewer of Godwin's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* who commented more than a year after Wollstonecraft's death that the book "will be read with disgust by every female who has any pretensions to delicacy; with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality; and with indignation by anyone who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman whose frailties should have been buried in oblivion" (3). The need for women to express themselves through a coded discourse derives from the gender-driven expectations placed on women's writing, expectations that correlate to the social attitudes governing women's "proper" behaviour which excludes politicizing or writing about society's ills. Women writers used authorial strategies that distanced their feminine voices from the meanings in their texts. Their 'coded discourse' creates palimpsests that can be deciphered by modern readers to understand the social anxiety expressed by their authors.

The coded discourse used by the woman writer, besides offering a covert criticism of society, creates spaces, or recesses, in the text to be filled by their readers. Hoeveler cites Roland Barthes's assertion that we continue to read a text because we collude with its "enigmatic code" and are "engaged in trying to decipher those parts of the text that are still unresolved for us as readers" (21). She also asserts that the Gothic heroine's 'enigmatic code' centres on "questions of properly gendered behavior, power/property, and the relation of both to sexuality" (21). Gothic heroines, like their female authors, are engaged less in an interpretative struggle than in a highly gendered and ideological one. To reiterate my earlier point, what is *not* written is as telling as what *is* written. The 'unresolved parts' of female Gothic texts are the gaps that exist between fictional tale and social reality. Readers fill in the lacunae of the text by engaging with it, using their own knowledge and experience to decipher its 'enigmatic code.'

Critical Reviews

Modern examinations of the Gothic texts of writers like Radcliffe, Lee and Fenwick reveal what Hoeveler describes as "a coded system whereby women authors covertly communicated to other women their ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominant sexual ideologies of their culture" (5). Modern readers can employ a knowledge of history to understand what exists beneath the surface of female Gothic texts and to view the rather dystopic vision they present of eighteenth-century society, a vision that is somehow made optimistic by Radcliffe. Contemporary criticism of the Gothic novel, on the other hand, did not read the sub-text and so missed the significance of the text's 'coded system,' instead placing emphasis on the complexities of plot and language. Criticism of women's writing was sometimes very severe, especially if the author broached subjects not considered appropriate for feminine commentary. For example, women writers who advocated radical change were harshly criticized by the likes of William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Richard Polwhele and, later, John Wilson Croker as well as various reviewers whose names have since faded into oblivion. Those critics who were pleased with women writers of the Gothic were often delighted with their "elegant language" or amusing little tales, but sometimes took exception to historical inaccuracy or the use of the supernatural.

Women writers did influence some of their male counterparts; Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats found inspiration in the work of many of their female contemporaries (Wu 17). Coleridge, in *Critical Review* (November 1794), calls *The Mysteries of Udolpho* 'The most interesting novel in the English language' (*Romanticism: the CD ROM)*. In his review of the text in the same publication in August 1794, Coleridge discusses the novel's "little defects," notably that the heroine's "manners do not sufficiently correspond with the aera the author has chosen." He notes that it

> is possible that the manners of different ages may not differ so much as we are apt to imagine, and more than probable that we are generally wrong when we attempt to delineate any but our own; but there is at least a style of manners which our imagination has appropriated to each period, and which, like the costume of theatrical dress, is not departed from without hurting the feelings. (*Romanticism: the CD ROM*)

What Coleridge and other contemporary critics saw as errors in reporting history, or a playful attempt to portray history, I contend is actually an authorial strategy for representing the condition of women in a patriarchal society.

Authorial Strategy

Women writers of Gothic fiction rely on "safe" narratives to conceal their deeper subversive sub-texts. They, like their heroines, exist in what Elaine Showalter describes as a double cultural zone, where the dominant culture and feminine, that is domestic, culture overlap. Their covert writing reveals the ways in which women negotiate, and undermine, the dominant masculine culture and resist the domestic sphere. Women authors of Gothic texts subvert the ideology of "separate spheres" by "valorizing the private female world of the home while they fictively destroy the public/juridical masculine world" and do so in such a way that women are "no longer victimized by it but fictively [take] control of it" (Hoeveler 5). Among the strategies they use to 'take control' are the metaphoric use of the Gothic setting and the reconstruction of history.

The Politics of Architecture

Lee's use of Gothic convention constitutes an overtly political use of Gothic elements. Her use of the Gothic edifice is not limited to the symbolic, as it is in other texts. The castles of *The Recess* are still in use defensively, so they are political structures as much as they are psychological symbols for imprisoning domesticity. Ellinor and Matilda spend most of their lives hidden within, and beneath, these political structures. The castle maintains the security of the monarch, protecting the crown against incursion, but for Ellinor and Matilda the castle and the political intrigue of the court represent personal danger and vulnerability. Similarly, the castle Radcliffe appropriates in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is political, but Radcliffe tends to the symbolic in her construction. Montoni's castle is used as a defensive bastion, but, even though it functions in political fashion, the castle is used for illicit purposes and not for the preservation of the crown and state. Montoni has become part of the banditti and his castle a place to harbour criminals and criminal activity. The various criminal factions operate like armies, and are even called armies. The role of the castle of Udolpho in the politics of crime subverts the politics of the state. The women who are held within the castle are excluded from its political role. Emily, Ellinor and Matilda, locked in the castles, are symbolically and literally both locked into and locked out of the political structure.

The Gothic text, with its Gothic ruins signifying the patriarchal political structure, offers escape. Gothic architecture had a long history in Northern Europe long before it was featured in literature. The dark appeal of Gothic architecture and its connection to the sublime and to a nostalgic past contrasts sharply with the appeal to order and reason that characterized the classical architecture that dominated British building early in the eighteenth century (Miall 345). As a symbol of order and reason, classical architecture represents the patriarchal political structure. Gothic architecture represents the obverse of the ordered political structure, but it offers no relief from ubiquitous patriarchy. Gothic architecture is chaotic and associated with the sublime, with "the forces of vastness, power, obscurity and terror" (Miall 345-36).

The labyrinthine structure of the gothic edifice represents escape from the orderly and repressive patriarchal political structure, if the heroine can but run quickly enough, but there is no comfort or security to be found within the mysterious and dangerous interior spaces. The gothic castle, as both a physical structure and a metaphor for the interior spaces of the mind, is a frightening place. Within its dark winding corridors the heroine is impelled by terror to flee. Terror is an essential part of the sublime, with obscurity and uncertainty marking the difference between terror and horror. The difference, as Radcliffe describes it ("On the supernatural in poetry"), is that 'the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them…where lies the great difference between terror and horror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany' terror (Miall 349). Thus, as Miall notes, terror empowers as it facilitates escape, while horror freezes and incapacitates. Yet, as terrifying as the gothic structure is, negotiating and escaping its hidden spaces enables the heroine to claim her own feminized domestic space.

The gothic castle, particularly in Radcliffe's work, provides a portal to a contrived and phantasmagorical world where good always triumphs over evil. As Hoeveler states, the fantasy of the Gothic text concludes with the "escape into a garden on a gothic estate, shorn of its tyrant and now in the hands of its good, rightful, and magically powerful mistress" (65). The female Gothic novel, like the gothic folly, reifies "an elaborately artificial and contrived gothic world" (Hoeveler 65). This fantasy world offers readers an escape from their contemporary socio-political situation. The escape from the Gothic castle re-inscribes the domestic sphere as female-centred and safe, a fantasy that offers the hope of a happy ending. When the heroine does not escape to a happy ending, it is because of her oppression by the patriarchal order, a social system that, from a feminine point of view, has a mandate to figuratively imprison women.

The Deceit of History

One of the ways female Gothic authors veil their texts to reveal the condition of women in their own time is by displacing the texts to the Elizabethan era, or to some unspecific but clearly distant time, and incorporating contemporary elements within the medieval setting. They thereby establish for the reader a means of comparison to, and identification with, the heroine. Conduct books advocated the study of history for women, but recorded history, as Austen's Catherine Morland points out, is a patriarchal structure that excludes the social history that involves women. The representation of history in these female Gothics is therefore of particular interest. While Radcliffe and Lee have been criticized for their lack of historical knowledge, they were far from academic slouches. Ann Radcliffe's family, though not one that moved extensively in literary circles,[23] was well-connected to the professional classes, and, early in her life, Radcliffe met a wide variety of learned and intelligent people, such as Hester Thrale Piozzi and Elizabeth Montagu (Dobrée ix). Eliza Fenwick, though little is known of her early life, was described by Francis Place, the radical reformer, as 'a fine, handsome, sensible, well-educated lady, a good judge of the world, and desirous to be useful in it' (Luria 9). Sophia Lee was a playwright before she established a successful school for girls in Bath and was remembered as 'a woman of great conversational powers and an excellent instructress, inspiring her pupils with liking and respect' (Isaac 200-1). She may have taught Ann Radcliffe (Varma viii). The apparent contradiction between the understanding of these women authors and their use of history demands a deeper examination of the way they apply history to their texts.

History assumes an important role in the Gothic novel, not just in the way it "safely" displaces events to another time, but in the way it covertly reveals women's situation. The most significant aspect of history in the Gothic novel is its interpretation of an obscure past. The attention to historic details is less important than establishing the sense of an archaic and dangerous past. The 'sense' of the past is evident in Fenwick's *Secrecy*, which, though clearly set in the eighteenth century, bears a medieval veneer. The feeling that the novel belongs in another time originates in the intangible sense of archaism cast over the character of Sibella who is, like so many Gothic heroines, imprisoned by her autocratic guardian within a gothic castle, complete with moat, drawbridge and hermitage. It is Valmont's thinking that constructs this sense of the past; his Rousseauesque ideals fail to mesh with the text's. The Gothic's concern with the past is evidence of the eighteenth century's view of feudalism and the aristocracy, revealed in the genre's theme of the past catching up with the present. Walpole presents this theme as the "sins of the father visited upon the son"; however, in the female Gothic the past, represented as feudal inheritance practices, catches up with the present to punish the mother and her daughters by imprisoning them in the Gothic castle.

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[23] The Wedgwood-Bentley circle they took part in was scientific and probably literary to some extent.

Radcliffe places Emily "in the year 1584" and is throughout the text somewhat cavalier with her historical setting, as some contemporary critics pointed out. For example, Coleridge's review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* notes that:

> There are other little defects, which impartiality obliges us to notice. The manners do not sufficiently correspond with the aera the author has chosen; which is the latter end of the sixteenth century. There is, perhaps, no direct anachronism, but the style of accomplishments given to the heroine, a country young lady, brought up on the banks of the Garonne; the mention of botany; of little circles of infidelity, etc. give so much the air of modern manners, as is not counterbalanced by Gothic arches and antique furniture. (*Romanticism: The CD ROM*)

However, Radcliffe does pay considerable attention to historical details, especially of English law of the sixteenth century. As I discussed in my first chapter, Emily St. Aubert, in the sixteenth century, has more legal autonomy in terms of retaining possession of her property than her eighteenth-century female readers. In fact, *Udolpho*'s legal system "protected women to a degree that did not occur in England until half a century after the novel appeared" (Ellis 123). Radcliffian Gothics expose the customs and the supporting legal systems that place women at a disadvantage, especially patriarchal and parental control over marriage and finances, presenting them in a genre suitable for a female audience. Radcliffe maintains her respectability because, as Ellis asserts, the "'real contradictions' of eighteenth-century life are so close to the 'medieval' surface of her novels" (100). By situating the tale "in the province of Gascony" she removes it sufficiently from eighteenth-century England that her careful assertions of Emily's and Madame Montoni's legal rights become, by comparison, a covert censure of the legal restrictions faced by eighteenth-century women. While Emily has the legal recourse of a sixteenth-century woman, her late eighteenth-century conduct and values buy her nothing but trouble. The identification of the reader with the text—a text written for a middle-class female audience—fills in the lacunae of time and creates the subtext's criticism of eighteenth-century politics and social culture.

Perhaps the most problematic representation of the past is Sophia Lee's *The Recess*. Although, as Varma notes, Lee "ploughed a deep furrow in the literary world" and her "bold experiment in fiction" was successful, she was criticized harshly for her abuse of the historical record (xviii). A review of *The Recess* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (vol. 53) disapproves of Lee's literary license:

> But, though the writer has a fruitful invention, we cannot say much in commendation of a work which abounds with intrigues, illegitimacy, and love at first sight. Nor can we approve of the falsification of history, so well known in various instances besides those of Lord Leicester's wives, though he had three, the poisoning Lady Essex, who survived him, giving Sir Philip Sydney a wife, &c. … And how a West Indian from Jamaica could be resident in London in the 16th century, when that island was in the

> hands of the Spaniards, and was known by the name of St. Jago, we leave the writer to explain. (July 1783, 600)

Another critic, for *The Monthly Review* (1786), is also unsympathetic towards Lee's handling of historical facts, describing the text as

> a novel in which fiction is indeed too lavishly employed to heighten and embellish some well-known and distinguished facts in the English history;–we say *too lavishly*, because the mind is ever divided and distracted when the fact so little accords with the fiction, and Romance and History are at perpetual variance with one another. (*The Recess*, xxiii)

Lee hardly fares better with some modern reviewers. J.M.S. Tompkins, the writer of the foreword to the 1972 McGrath edition of *The Recess*, is in accord with contemporary critics. Apparently reading the text only for its plot and language (which is somewhat inelegant with its dangling participles and confusing pronouns), Tompkins asserts that the reader "must accept that the headmistress of a successful school for girls could ignore or confuse relevant historical dates" and describes Lee as "enthusiastic but far from learned" (i, iv). Varma, writing the text's introduction, has a better realization than Tompkins of the significance of Lee's use of history: "Although there is nothing of real historical spirit in *The Recess*, the great shadows that fall across the book are delightful. In spite of the soft veneer of history over them, it remains a glorified tale of contemporary domestic life set in a remote background" (xvii). Isaac's study of *The Recess* on the other hand attests to Lee's historical acumen, and describes her as "no mean historian" (215).

Lee's novel is a complex and important semi-historic trace within which she credits women as playing a part in shaping history, not through prose or action but through their domestic roles as wives, lovers, sisters and friends of great men. When Lee displaces her "tale of other times" to the Elizabethan court, she constructs for her heroines a different, because more political, situation than the typical Gothic heroine faces. She presents love as a powerful political motivator that compels the actions of Leicester, Essex and Elizabeth herself. Lee's reconstruction of actual historic events, with passion as a prime motivator for men's actions, suggests that, though politics and war are masculine worlds, the presence of women does have an impact on the course of history.

Although Matilda and Ellinor are apparently invisible within the structure of the court, Lee re-writes history so that their existence is the catalyst for important historic events. Likewise, the physical absence of Mary is an emotional presence that has great implications for her daughters and has a special connection to the novel's readers.

Lee takes advantage of the eighteenth century's infatuation with Mary Queen of Scots and builds her novel around the facts and fictions associated with the unfortunate queen. Lee rewrites history, populating her text with real and fictional people, and reworks large historic moments such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Mary Stuart's execution and Essex's revolt, presenting them from Matilda's and Ellinor's points of view. She also observes smaller historic details. Isaac notes Lee's account of Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth Castle on her royal progress of 1575. Pageants were performed for the monarch's amusement along her route, "even in the lake. … Sure enough, one of Lee's heroines turns up costumed as a nymph splashing and thrashing most discontentedly in the lake at Kenilworth during an episode of the novel" (215).

Lee's manipulation of the historical record recasts history as personal and historic events as the result of personal motivation. I offer as evidence of Lee's conscious manipulation of history her own statements concerning her text's historicity and the recorded history of Mary Queen of Scots from which Lee draws her inspiration. Lee asserts in her "Advertisement" to the text that a "wonderful coincidence of events stamps the narration at least with probability" (unp). Lee's assertion that the events of her text are 'stamped with probability' indicates her awareness of the historicity of her novel as does her statement that "[h]istory, like painting, only perpetuates the striking features of the mind" (unp). Lee skillfully builds her romance around the factual and fictional stories of the life of Mary Queen of Scots,[24] supposed mother of Matilda and Ellinor.

I will digress here to examine the similarities between Lee's representation of Mary and the historical record. Mary (1542-1587) inherited the throne of Scotland at the age of one week and was, during her childhood, kept in seclusion for her protection, living, for all intents and purposes, as a prisoner. The conditions of her imprisonment are echoed in that of her fictive daughters and granddaughter. Mary was apparently a passionate woman, and is recorded by history as a licentious one as well. In 1567, Mary assembled her forces against Scottish nobles who revolted against her policies and her marriage to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. Her forces were overrun and she surrendered, abdicating her throne in favour of her infant son James. Mary was held prisoner at Lochleven Castle for eleven months, from June 1567 until May 1568. In mid-July she miscarried twins (*Biography*, Fraser 362, 368, 370-71, Lewis 6, 25). Additionally, according to Fraser, there was some supposition that Mary did not miscarry but gave birth to a daughter who was smuggled to France and grew up in the convent of Notre Dame de Soissons although there is no contemporary evidence to support such a claim (371). Lee's text is obviously inspired by the many stories surrounding Mary's life and imprisonment, and these interesting facts and allusions reinforce Lee's assertion that a 'wonderful coincidence of events stamps the narration at least with probability.'

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[24] At the age of one, Mary was betrothed to Edward , son of Henry VIII, by the Earl of Arran, who wished to forge an alliance with England. The Scottish parliament annulled the treaty, precipitating war with England. After the Scottish defeat at Pinkie in 1547, she was sent to the French court as the betrothed of the Dauphin Francis (later Francis II), whom she married at 16. Widowed in 1560, she returned to Scotland. She considered herself the rightful heir to the throne of England. In 1565 Mary wed her cousin Lord Darnley, who also had a claim to the English crown. Disgusted by his debauchery Mary was soon alienated from him. The vicious murder of Rizzio, her secretary, by Darnley and a group of Protestant nobles led to her agreement to his murder in 1567. Three months later she married James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, the chief suspect in Darnley's murder, angering Scottish nobles who rose against her. Mary was imprisoned at Lochleven and compelled to abdicate her throne. She escaped and appealed to Elizabeth, who imprisoned her. Elizabeth faced a political dilemma with Mary's incarceration; she could not give Mary up to the Scottish nobles because of the loss of monarchical dignity but she also could not risk destroying the pro-English party in Scotland by restoring Mary to the throne. Mary became the focus of plots to assassinate Elizabeth and restore Catholicism. In 1586 Mary, imprisoned at Chartley, was intentionally allowed to

After her escape from Lochleven Mary appealed to Elizabeth for protection and help in regaining her throne. Elizabeth, jealous of Mary, imprisoned her, first at Tutbury and then at Sheffield Castle, where she was held prisoner for 13 years. Mary was frequently ill during her incarceration, and may very well have walked the garden supported by two maids, as Lee describes (I, 191). During her incarceration Mary was the focus of several plots against Elizabeth, including one that would have her marry the Duke of Norfolk and make them the monarchs of England.[25] Mary's correspondence

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communicate with Anthony Babington who was plotting to murder Elizabeth. Mary was tried for treason and found guilty on October 15, 1586 and executed on February 8, 1587.

[25] The proposed marriage was part of one of the treaties that attempted to free Mary and restore her to the throne of Scotland. It was also a means toward placing her on England's throne. Sir William Cecil's notes, endorsed by Mary Queen of Scots, state: "This treaty took no effect, partly because her Majesty was secretly informed that Lord Boyd, and the Bp. of Ross, practised to steal away the Scotch Queen, but principally because Q. Mary's commissioners were inhibited to enter into the examination of Darnley's murder, and were, by a special commission from her, commanded to dissolve the treaty. 15 Dec. 1568. The second treaty began 24 April, 1569, the Bp. of Ross alone being sent to deal with the Q. of England, and the lords of her council. During this treaty, which was entertained by her Majesty with all kindness, a treaty was practised underhand without her privity, between Norfolk and the Scotch Queen, which was communicated to the Spanish and French Ambassadors, and to certain of the nobility of the north of England, before she was acquainted with it. Candishe [Cavendish] was sent secretly by the duke to the Scotch Queen with letters and tokens to further the match. The Earl of Northumberland sent Leonard Dacres to propound to the Scotch Queen a means of escape, which not succeeding, he brake into an open rebellion. The Earl of Westmoreland did the same, and by help of Scotland invaded England. These things, discovered by her Majesty, were impediments to the second treaty." (Leader 75)

with Norfolk was of an affectionate nature, although it is unclear how sincere her affections were, and she replied very carefully to the suggestion that she marry him (Leader 73-109).[26] Again the 'stamp of probability' is evident in that Matilda's and Ellinor's father is asserted to be the Duke of Norfolk. Norfolk was enamoured of the Queen of Scots and was executed in 1571 "for the rebellious sympathy that Mary awakened in him" (Lewis 38). Mary was manoeuvred into a plot to assassinate Elizabeth and was executed at Elizabeth's command in 1587.

The similarities between recorded history and Lee's historicization of Mary Queen of Scots exceed the possibility of coincidence. She is not 'far from learned' (Tompkins) but is instead 'no mean historian' (Isaac) and a skillful crafter of fiction. Mary is the perfect model for a Gothic story of women's incarceration and political vulnerability and for the examination of woman as historical subject.[27] Mary was patriarchally confined, politically silenced, sexualized, a subject of violence and a literary figure, both as subject and prolific epistolary writer. Though a Queen, she represents the universality of the repressed condition of women; she embodies the manner in which, regardless of class, the sin of the mother–the sin of being female–is visited upon her daughters.

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[26] Mary's reply to the suggestion that she marry Norfolk, if Elizabeth agreed to the union: "…being resolved of certain doubts which occur to me from the trust I have in the Queen, my good sister, and her nobility's friendship towards me, as also from the goodwill I perceive my Lord of Norfolk bears towards me, hearing him so well reported abroad, I will wholly follow her counsel, not doubting, but as I trust them herein, being in the greatest matter that can appertain to myself, they will have consideration of my causes, as of her that wholly committeth herself into their hands." (Leader 77)

[27] Lee was not the first to incorporate the mystery and intrigue of Mary Queen of Scots in a work of fiction. John Lyly's *Endimion* (1588) presents Mary as the seductive and pathetic Tellus. Edmund Spenser's unfinished *The Faerie Queen* (1596) figures Duessa as an apparition of Mary Queen of Scots, who desires to kill her queen, Mercilla, one of several representations of Elizabeth. John Banks's *The Island Queens* (1684) is a fictionalized account of Mary and Elizabeth. It metamorphosed into *The Albion Queens*, a play performed in 1704, which resurrected Mary as a sentimental heroine (Lewis 39, 53-9, 86-98).

Lee blurs the boundaries between the real and unreal when she takes advantage of the eighteenth century's cultic interest in the Queen of Scots. The profound interest in Mary was largely initiated by Eliza Haywood's *Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots*, a fictionalized biography that has been attributed to a misreading of an earlier text (Lewis 124). Haywood translated Pierre de Boisguillebert's *Marie Stuart, Reyne d'Escosse* (1675), and in her apparent failure to translate it correctly created the historical Mary Queen of Scots who was emulated and identified with by many eighteenth-century women (Lewis 124-33).[28] Lee's appropriation of a fictive Mary incorporates recorded history and popular culture with women's experience of repression.

Lewis asserts that Haywood's text is "a perfect example of how Georgian women maintained themselves, and Mary, in their culture's–indeed their language's–gaps and vacancies, which is to say in the recesses that the Queen of Scots had fashioned for them" (133). The 'recesses' created by Mary are echoed in Lee's text, as she says in her Advertisement: "the depredations of time have left breaks in the story, which sometimes only heightens the pathetic" (unp). Her respect for truth does not allow her "to attempt connecting these even where they appeared faulty." The 'breaks in the story' disrupt the way history is recorded as a chain of events and offers instead the gaps between the events as historically significant. *The Recess*, as Lewis notes, "is shaped, and verified, by what just isn't there. Posing as a sixteenth-century manuscript, Lee's novel actually treasures its constitutive 'chasms' both as reality's traces and as loops through which Mary herself might slip from past to present" (139).

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[28] The influence of Mary Queen of Scots is evident in the fashionable headdresses popular in 1765 that copied the one worn by Mary in portraits, as well as in the portraits of many aristocratic women who posed in sixteenth-century attire and the frequent costumes of women at masquerades. The latter was so prevalent that "Horace Walpole complained that the most Georgian of institutions, the masquerade, had become overrun with 'dozens of ugly Mary Queen of Scotts [sic]'" (Lewis 124).

'What isn't there' in female Gothics, besides historical accuracy, is the historical role of women, a role that has been diminished by the patriarchal record that Lee challenges by acknowledging women's historical importance, even though it is mostly undocumented. The effacement of women's historical role is represented metaphorically when Elizabeth, the patriarch in skirts, destroys the proof of Matilda's and Ellinor's identity. When she tears up the document that proves their royal birth, it is a patriarchal action that silences them and removes them from the historical record and the political structure. The erasure of their identities is the extinction of their historical selves.

Lee's traditional handling of the character of Elizabeth suggests a non-feminist stance and even complicity with the patriarchal order, but such is not the case. Lee presents Elizabeth as a sexually ambiguous figure. Her reign is figured in feminine terms through her personal relations, but her relationships are poisoned by her patriarchal authority. While Mary is figured as a fitting heroine with feminine characteristics—she is weak, victimised and depends on male support—Elizabeth, a strong woman, is demonised. However, it is not Elizabeth the woman but Elizabeth the monarch who is the problem. She is a patriarchal figure and, as Ellis notes, "stands in…for an entire set of patriarchal values that keep women confined to the home on the grounds that they need to be protected from the evils of the world" (73). Elizabeth is a controlling parent who selects Ellinor's husband, imprisons Mary and therefore also Matilda and Ellinor, destroys the proof of the sisters' identity and maintains an absolutist patriarchal hold over her subjects.

Patriarchal authority wielded by a woman is still patriarchal authority. Elizabeth's femininity does not reconstruct the role of the patriarch; she maintains the Law of the Father. She is, in her role as patriarch, a threat to women who have few options in the political public realm. In the dangerous world outside the domestic sphere, what a woman needs, the heroine included, is not the protection of men but autonomy, "a capacity to take the initiative, to face danger and follow her convictions no matter how slim appears the possibility of success" (Ellis 74). By reconstructing history so that love is the motivating force for political action and women's domestic role helps to shape history, Lee blurs the boundaries between the public and the domestic, pointing out that the domestic is always already political and the political is always already domestic. Lee thus asserts the importance of women and that patriarchal authority, even when wielded by a woman, threatens women. This is Lee's feminist stance.

Whereas the character of Elizabeth as a political figure in Lee's text is absolutist, the sense of Mary as a woman and as a historical figure is both real and unreal; she is composed of fact and fiction, represented as much by myth as by historical record. In Lee's text, Mary is connected to Matilda and Ellinor in a way that incorporates fact, fiction and literary representation, blended together in a palimpsestic representation of history and women's social and political imprisonment. As Lewis suggests, Matilda's similarity to her mother is a bond that is inseparable from her sense of her own reality, or unreality, and her relationship to her sister is also bound by the sense of what is real or unreal (143). Ellinor's story is the recovery of her own sense of loss, transmitted to Matilda in a manuscript and reproduced in the text as pieces connected by asterisks, creating of the page a "labyrinth of literal recesses," telling her story as much by what is not written as by what is written (Lewis 143). The literal recesses of the page imagine the losses that produce and are created by history.

As authorial strategies, the metaphoric use of Gothic architecture and the manipulation of history allow the author to distance herself from her subversive subtext that reveals the sense of incarceration experienced by middle- and upper-class women. Writing in the genre acceptable for women writers—the novel, especially the epistolary novel—allows the female author to remain safely within the domestic bounds established by the patriarchy. However, the use of specific authorial strategies provides a means for the woman writer to counter the dominant masculine culture and resist the domestic sphere. The use of authorial strategies, as it effaces the author, requires the reader to complete the subtext by filling in the lacunae of the palimpsestic text.

Text as Palimpsest

The female Gothic text, as palimpsest, offers us metaphoric representations of social culture and story-telling. The representation of life is asserted as realism, but it is secondary to what is actually lived; the surface tale presents the text's apparent realism, but it is the subtext that is closer to the life lived. The text's portrayal of life is not equal to the life of the individual, but represents it more like a mirror image, constituting a performance of life that is, by virtue of its signification, immensely political. Thus, the text exists as a double narrative, with the subtext available to be read if we recognize the structures employed within it.

The need for the reader to fill in the text's gaps re-orders the reading of the text, establishing a dialogue between the text and the reader and subsuming the author. The female Gothic author exists in her text in the same way as the heroine's mother; the author, as "mother" of her text, remains "underground," her presence abjected by patriarchy's standards of acceptable feminine behaviour and areas of interest but expressed in the subtext of the novel. The reader is compelled to decipher the text's 'enigmatic code' "that becomes mirrored by our reading process" (Hoeveler 23). The contemporary reader identifies the heroine's ideological struggle with her social culture. Thus the reader is involved in the creation of the text; it is her understanding, if only on a gut level, of the subtext's revelation of women's repression that completes the dialogue. The involvement of the reader in the creation of the doubled text undermines patriarchal literary standards by eschewing the demand for women to write only about "appropriate" subjects.

The strategies employed by women writers of Gothic novels are tools for portraying the oppression of women and the carceral nature of domesticity in a patriarchal social culture and communicating this oppression to the female reading audience. Gothic edifices stand figuratively and literally as prisons and, with their hidden passages and secret places, are easily identified as both the inner self of the psyche and the metaphoric representation of the female body. The Gothic villain can readily be viewed as the embodiment of oppressive and threatening patriarchy. Supernatural apparitions are as difficult to understand as irrational fears, but as easily explained in the female Gothic. Swordplay and wounds sustained by the hero remind us that masculinity is aggressive, violent and threatening. Pursuits down dark corridors and hazardous journeying through the sublime are as perilous for women as trying to negotiate one's way in a male-dominated world. The heroine's marginalization and powerlessness against the authority of a corrupt paternal figure "struck a deeply resonant chord in the general female reading public" (Hoeveler 55).

Conclusion

It is perhaps serendipitous that the Gothic genre lends itself so well to appropriation by women writers. Gothic romances offered a perfect opportunity for women writers to critique the flaws in their social culture while working in an acceptably feminine genre. Clery notes, from a historicist perspective, that Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* conflates "ancient and modern romance" and transgresses the "peaceful, commercial, civilized, well ordered" eighteenth-century society (xxv). Walpole's novel begins as the masquerade of a found manuscript. Gothic novels by women follow Walpole's example but approach the genre from a uniquely female perspective, covertly transgressing the 'peaceful' and 'well-ordered' rules of late eighteenth-century British society. The Gothic, in the hands of women writers, becomes a mask for women's situation, concealing the features of patriarchy with a disguise that can be seen through by those who recognize what lies behind it. I believe that the women writers of Gothic novels improve the genre by their appropriation of its form as a means of female-centred social and political commentary.

Female Gothic novels explore many of the concerns of late eighteenth-century women, offering comparisons of contemporary customs and practices with those of an earlier age, leaving textual recesses for the reader to complete. In doing so, they establish a dialogue between author and reader and create a uniquely female discursive space. Female Gothics examine the vulnerability innate to being female in a patriarchal culture, which includes, not only misogynistic attitudes, but a gender-biased legal system that restricts women's ability to subsist independently and to own and manage property. Even though women authors of Gothic novels often find it necessary to express themselves covertly, they still exert a form of political authority by subverting areas of concern to women such as paternalistic authority, inheritance practices, marriage customs, domesticity and maternity.

The domestic woman was idealized throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century in countless conduct books in which the household is represented as a microcosm of social relations. Such discourses "revised the semiotic culture at its most basic level and enabled a coherent idea of the middle class to take shape" (Ellis 63). The decline of conduct books at the turn of the century does not indicate the demise of a popular trend but is an indication that their message had been incorporated into a general social frame of reference.[29] The general attitudes of eighteenth-century patriarchal society expressed in conduct literature are taken into account in female Gothic novels. As Emily, Matilda, Ellinor, Julia, Ellena and nearly every other Gothic heroine run through the gloomy corridors of the patriarchal construct and escape through the vastness of the sublime natural world, one is reminded that the danger the heroine flees comes not merely from the Gothic villain but from the whole masculine hegemony that governs her every action. Female Gothics look beyond ideology to expose the social ambivalence that is the material reality of women's existence. Reading these texts in a later era reveals that the Gothic heroine's renovation of the domestic sphere and the mother's release from the dungeon only free them to be established as the Victorian "angel in the house." I do not imply that female Gothic authors' criticism of their own social culture was ineffectual; on the contrary, their efforts allowed women writers of subsequent generations, such as Mary

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[29] Peter J. Miller, in *The Education of the English Lady, 1770-1820* (Diss. University of Alberta, 1969) lists the number of publications devoted to the "character, duties and education of women" in Britain: 1760 to 1769 - 16; 1770 - 23; 1780 - 25; 1790 - 41; 1800 - 35; 1810 - 13 (492-98). (Miall)

Shelley, the Brontës, Virginia Woolf, and many others, to express themselves more fully. Radcliffe, Lee and Fenwick, like Wollstonecraft and More, are, in effect, the elder sisters of the Victorian "New Woman."

Recent criticism of female Gothic novels reveals shifts in traditional thinking about the genre which will, I believe, initiate a dialogue concerning the status of eighteenth-century women writers as shapers of public opinion.[30] While we cannot determine with a large degree of certainty the extent of the impact of these texts, we can surmise by the popularity of the genre that Gothic texts by women writers did indeed "speak" to their audience. Therefore, we can envision a substantial contribution by female Gothic authors to public opinion, and hence to the social changes, of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While Gothic novels by women are not revolutionary, they do contribute to the body of reforming work by social activists like Wollstonecraft, More, Barbauld, Baillie, Inchbald, *et al* by criticizing the patriarchal social order and envisioning a resistant heroine who attempts to redefine her own space within her culture. Through their coded discourses—their palimpsests—women authors of Gothic novels offer their contemporary readers a female-centred fantasy that escapes patriarchal oppression, one through which the modern reader can examine the carceral nature of late eighteenth-century domesticity.

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[30] For example, recent works by Diane Hoevelor, whose *Gothic Feminism* asserts that Gothic heroines are professional victims, and Anne Mellor, whose *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000) challenges many traditional notions about women's writing.

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